

Freemont Research



# 拷問姫 異世界

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MF文庫



Freeman  
Gothic  
Unchained

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拷問姫  
異世界





「残虐に凄惨に殺されし、罪なき魂よ。

これより、貴様は従者として余に仕えよ」



有無を言わせない口調だった。  
殺された人間に對して、自分に仕えろとはわけがわからない。混乱のあまり思わず薄く笑いながら、ようやく息ができる事実に気がついた權人の前で、彼女は堂々と宣言した。

「我が名は『拷問姫』エリザベート・レ・ファニユ。

誇り高き狼にして卑しき牝豚である」

瀬名權人 ♦ Kaito Sena

「許すつ！」

やればできるではないかと、  
にんまりとエリザベートは嬉しげに笑った。  
權人は思わず、その豪奢な黒髪の上に、  
びこびこと満足げに動く猫耳を幻視した。

エリザベート ♦ Elisabeth

「お帰りなさいませ、カイト様！  
無事のご帰還をお待ちしておりましたっ！」

ヒナ Hina



「天と地とこの世のあまねく  
全てから見捨てられ  
孤独に死ぬがいいツ！」

What follows are the records of a great sinner.

The records of a woman forsaken by all of creation, only to die in solitude.

O Lord, absolve her of her sins.

O Lord, forgive her for her transgressions.

Using fire and suffering, incinerate all impurities beyond a mortal body's ability to bear.

The depraved woman, the hungry wolf, the greedy sow.

Only through incineration shall she be liberated from her sins.

When the time comes, You shall mete out the punishment of atonement, shedding tears of blood.

By Your grace, may the sinner be blessed with Your mercy and Your prayers.

Please listen. Until the final moment when her life runs out, listen to the screams of her atonement.

Your forgiveness brings light to the mortal realm and we offer You our reverence.

O Lord, may You grant salvation to her soul in the ashes.

Steeped in sin, "Torturchen"—Elisabeth La Fanu.

Until the advent of that very day—At least do a little good before you die.

Excerpt from the beginning of *The Records of Torturchen*

ここに記すは、一人の大罪人の記録である。  
天と地のあまねく全てより見捨てられ、孤独に死ぬ女の記述である。

主よ、赦したまえ、彼の者の罪を。

主よ、哀れみたまえ、彼の者の咎を。

人には背負いきれぬ穢れを、火と苦痛をもって焼きたまえ。

最悪なる女を、飢えし狼を、貪欲な牝豚を。

焼かれることで、彼女は初めて己が罪より解放される。



その時が来れば、あなたは罪を贖うための罰を与え、血の涙を流される。

あなたは慈悲深く、その祈りは、罪人であろうと共にある。

耳をお傾けください。彼女の贖罪の悲鳴があがり、やがて費えるその時まで。

赦しは常にあなたの下にあり、我々はあなたを畏れ敬う。

主よ、あなたが彼女の御靈を、灰の中からお救いくださいますように。  
罪深き、『拷問姫』——エリザベート・レ・ファニユ

その日まで——せめて死ぬ前に善行を成せ。

『拷問姫の記録書』冒頭より抜粋



F r e m d e r t u r c h e n

プロローグ



## Prologue

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While being choked by the neck, Sena Kaito thought to himself... *I knew this was going to happen eventually.*

Having lived this long was already a miracle. His right arm was densely covered with lacerations while his left arm was a mess of bloody flesh and unable to move. His broken ankle was twisted in a bizarre way and the splint applied several months ago still had not been taken off. His belly had been hurting intensely starting three days ago. The organs inside could very well have ruptured already.

Seventeen years old and three months, Kaito's life had been wrecked on a whim, arbitrarily destroyed.

He had lived a life akin to livestock, aware that he was merely meat on someone's plate, but powerless to escape. In fact, Kaito's body was not going to be eaten, but would probably end up buried somewhere, or burned until not even bones remained, to be scattered in the mountains or the sea.

Amid heavy suffering that persisted endlessly, these thoughts occupied his mind. At the same time, his organs and blood vessels were being crushed progressively by big strong fingers. Widened so much that they were about to burst, his eyeballs were overflowing with viscous tears.

Even though he struggled madly, kicking the other person's body desperately, digging his fingernails like crazy into the hand that was gripping his neck, but fueled by a drug-induced frenzy, the other party—in other words, his father—had lost all sense of rationality and pain. His swollen tongue stuck out desperately,

trying to lick oxygen, moving haphazardly as though in deep thirst. At that moment, a part of Kaito separated from his body to calmly observe the situation. However, the chaotic feelings in his mind were swirling madly like an explosion... I-don't-wanna-die-I-don't-wanna-die-I-don't-wanna-die-I-don't-wanna-die-Don't-kill-me.

However, the flesh of his throat was practically crushed. His vision vanished, then lights flashed in what ought to be a scene of true darkness.

What appeared before him resembled the flashbacks that people commonly spoke of.

However, this was an extremely evil scenes, completely different from what people usually described.

For as far as he could see, everyone was dead.

Men, women, children, old people... All of them had been abandoned in extremely bizarre states of death. Resembling broken toys, their hands and feet had been severed, their bellies torn open, their limbs pulled off, their ears, eyeballs, teeth and tongues all lost.

In front of Kaito, was a mountain of *corpses that had been completely deprived of their human dignity.*

Cawing crows were pecking at the corpses to fly off with scraps of human flesh. Darkness dominated the view where he could see countless mouths. A crowd dressed in black hoods were raising their fists, howling at the top of their voices. Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill... An inordinate amount of blood lust and hatred were directed a girl.

In front of them was a black-haired maiden suspended in a straitjacket. The hundreds of chains dangling from the gallows had her body tied up securely, suspended in midair with her limbs spread out. It was like a butterfly had collided with a spider's web. With her sleek black hair fluttering in the wind, the maiden looked up.

Her face, whose sublime beauty sent shivers through one's body, turned, showing her crimson eyes to Kaito. Simultaneously, Kaito gasped.

The expression on the maiden's face was not a victim's expression.

Kaito did not register in her eyes. Fearlessly, she glared at the crowd that was directing their grudge and blood lust at her.

On that flawlessly beautiful face was a smile both evil and cruel.

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill... Amid the resumed shouting, she completely embraced the crowd's desire for execution and smiled. It was a mocking smile, very ominous, extremely beautiful and all-accepting. At that moment, an authoritative voice shook the sky.

—At least do a little good before you die.

Precisely at that moment, crack...

Back in the real world, Sena Kaito's neck snapped completely.

The adolescent who had been killed—Sena Kaito—slowly opened his eyes. Images of flames from a torch were imprinted onto his retinas. By the time he came to his senses, he discovered he was inside a room of stone. He knew he had been killed but did not think this was the underworld. His mind in muddle, Kaito found standing before him the girl whom he had seen earlier.

She was no longer kept in restraints, but based on her appearance, one could say that she was restrained in a way.

Her slender body was dressed in black bondage dress with only leather straps across her chest. Under those criss-crossed straps, her well-shaped breasts were mostly exposed. Her waist and lower torso were covered by black fabric. Extending under the short skirt, her beautiful legs were wrapped in sheer fabric that resembled stockings. The inner side of the skirt's black hem was dyed scarlet, extending long behind her like a cape. Although this attire was quite sexy in many ways, unbelievably, the viewer did not gather a seductive impression.

Wearing that bondage-style dress, she seemed as dignified as a queen in formal attire.

Soft and fluttering, her long black hair was an excellent match for her face. Kaito had never seen anyone so beautiful throughout the course of his brief life. However, in those ruby-like eyes of red, the diabolical glint of cruelty flashed.

Suddenly, this peerless beauty opened her dainty lips. Staring straight at Kaito, she spoke in a commanding tone:

"O innocent soul that has been murdered brutally, you shall work for me as my servant henceforth."

*Who the hell would ask a murdered victim to work for her?* Extremely confused, Kaito could not help but smile faintly, finally noticing the fact that he could breathe now. In front of Kaito, she declared solemnly.

"I am 'Torturchen' Elisabeth Le Fanu, both a proud wolf and a lowly sow."

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## Chapter 1 - The Fourteen Demons

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Sitting on a desolate hill, a castle was encircled by a lush forest. Every corner of this castle had been built from irritatingly cold stone. Rather than a castle, it would be better to call it a fortress.

After spending three days in such an oppressive indoor environment, anyone would be plagued by nightmares of being crushed by stone. The complicated passages here meant that one could very well waste away and die in the labyrinth if one were to get lost. The castle's design evidently showed no consideration at all for the inhabitants, rather, there was a sense of rejection throughout.

The kitchen was not convenient to use at all, always shrouded in a claustrophobic feeling like a dungeon cell.

But even under the pressure of this sort of atmosphere, ingredients were still ingredients after all.

Wearing a butcher's apron, Sena Kaito rolled up the sleeves of his cotton shirt and crossed his arms with displeasure. In front of him was a despairing quantity of innards, piled up in a small mountain. These pieces of flesh, soft and glistening with complicated shapes, were releasing a distinctive odor.

Kaito sighed and decided to chop up the intestines first, so he used a sharp knife to cut open the intestines lengthwise. Next, he removed the white membrane around the heart. While he was taking care of this vast number of entrails silently like an ascetic

monk, the kitchen shook violently. Even though stone fragments were falling from above, Kaito ignored the situation, still acting as though nothing had happened.

Even if this castle were to collapse soon, putting an end to his life, he did not want to care at all.

He opened a bottle of expensive-looking wine that he had taken from the wine cellar without permission then poured out of half of it into a silver platter originally dedicated to holding fruit. Then without any hesitation, he marinated several types of innards in the wine together with herbs whose names eluded him.

While he continued with his culinary work with a solemn expression, the entire castle shook again, but Kaito still did not let it bother him. Even if half the castle were to be blown away, all was fine so long as he survived unharmed. The world was peaceful, but an evil voice shattered this peace.

"Butler, butler!"

Adhering to the logic that his name was Kaito and not "butler," Kaito decided that he was not the one being called and resolutely ignored the voice. Finally, the manner of address changed.

"Kaito!"

"Too noisy! I hear you! Coming right away!"

Fearing for his life if he kept ignoring the voice, Kaito dropped the liver he had covered with flour onto the counter then rushed to the corridor. The corridor had several stained glass windows at least, which alleviated the claustrophobic feeling somewhat. But also because of the stained glass, disgusting patterns that creeped Kaito

out from the bottom of his heart were also projected onto the floor. Dashing across the colorful corridor, Kaito climbed the spiral staircase and pushed open a massive set of double doors.

A strong gust of wind greeted him. Inside this throne room, on the pedestal was of course, literally a magnificent throne. There were even a few ancient tapestries hanging in the room, filling the space with solemnity. However, a quarter of all this stuff had now been blown away, opening a massive hole in the wall, exposing the sky's refreshing blueness.

It was totally no joke. What was happening right now could very well demolish half the castle.

In front of the remains of this wanton destruction, a girl was standing with her arms crossed, her perfectly shaped legs standing on the rubble, haughtily waiting for Kaito. With a click of her heel contacting the ground, she turned towards Kaito.

Her black and gorgeous hair fluttered in the air while her red eyes pierced Kaito.

Hanging on her peerlessly beautiful face was a smile that was in no way delightful at all. Kaito found her face repugnant. With nails painted black, she pointed outside and spoke in a bird-like voice, like a cat that had eaten her fill.

"Behold, Kaito."

Kaito complied obediently and looked out the hole. The clear blue sky and the refreshingly green forest were now shrouded by a sticky red color and a rust-like stench, it was nauseating.

In front of him was a nasty scene from hell.

Dozens of iron stakes had sprouted out of the ground, impaling a creepy creature.

With his face frowning to the limit, Kaito scrutinized the pitiful corpse that was a bloody mess.

"What are your thoughts, Kaito?"



"What else can I say...? It's not only creepy but also pitiful."

"Hmph, what an accurate description of your senses. Not only are your words inadequate in expressive ability, but you also lack the wit to please your master. You are such a boring guy."

The girl shrugged. In front of her, the terrifying beast, an amalgamation of human corpses, was already dead. On the surface of the grotesque beast were hundreds of faces, attached to one another by stretching their cheeks and scalps to the limit, giving off groans in abject agony. Instead of a mane, the beast's back featured a line of human arms with a huge number of breasts hanging from its bloated belly.

The girl scoffed at the sacrilegious and grotesque abomination and said:

"Follow me, Kaito. The Knight has declared war on me. Or rather, he has come to pick a fight."

The girl licked her red lips, overjoyed. Surpassing leopards and wolves, she was more like a giant ravenous lion. Suppressing the revulsion in his heart, Kaito turned away from the beast's corpse and sighed.

"I don't mind, but the food will be ready in one hour. Whether you want to fight or to torture, save it for after the meal."

The only reason why Sena Kaito was currently stuck in this absolute mess of a situation was because he had been murdered.

\* \* \*

"Since you did not answer, I shall ask again. Pledge your allegiance to me."

"I refuse."

Confronted with the haughty demand from the girl calling herself Elisabeth, Kaito refused on the spot. The stranger had suddenly appeared before him, even though he was supposed to have died as a murdered victim just now, asking him to be her servant. Kaito was very confused, but he answered without hesitation. This was due to the mountain of bizarre corpses, the blood lust in the crowd, Elisabeth's sadistic smile... and most crucial of all, the title of "Torturchen."

With all these danger signals gathered in one place, the girl before his eyes was evidently the one responsible for creating that tragedy. Hence, Kaito had no response other than refusal.

Kaito expected Elisabeth's mood to be ruined as a result, but for some reason, she nodded, impressed.

"Oh? What decisiveness. Perhaps you viewed my memories while you were being summoned? Even so, such a decisive answer is still quite unexpected."

"Putting aside whether I'm working for you or not, did you just say 'summoned'? ...Hey, what is this place? Why am I here...? And most importantly, I should be dead."

"Yes, you are completely correct! You are already dead. Pitifully, tragically, brutally, killed like a worthless bug! In spite of that, summoned by me, you have obtained new life through a doll's body. This is a rare act of grace, so rejoice to your fill."

".....A doll?"

Hearing the word that Elisabeth had said out of the blue, Kaito could not help but touch his own body. Although she called him a doll, he found no difference between the texture of his skin and a human's. Although he did not have a mirror to check his appearance, there was nothing wrong with the height of his eye level, so he did not think his height had changed. He plucked out a hair from the back of his head and it was the brown color he had been born with.

Just as he was examining his body in doubt, Elisabeth spoke in exasperation.

"What are you doing? The vessel for your soul is a golem body created by none other than I. Unlike the ones that would collapse into a pile of dirt as soon as you alter the writing on their foreheads, this is a masterpiece created by yours truly, the great sorcerer and skilled artisan. This is also the reason why my words sound like your own country's language to your ears. Durability guaranteed, your body features all human organs with the same red blood coursing through your veins. However, you will not die even if more than half your body is destroyed. On the other hand, if you were to bleed dry of the blood imbued with my power, your soul would run the risk of disappearing."

"But my physique and hair color haven't changed."

"Your stupidity is truly incurable. As I have already explained, do not compare my masterpiece with those cheap varieties that are not worth mentioning. If a soul were to be placed into a body that differs excessively from the form of its previous life, the dissonance could very well cause a breakdown. This blank body was designed to conform to the soul in the first place. Although external injuries and internal maladies are automatically purged, appearance and physique... be it a face of poverty or a weak and skinny body, everything is consistent with your state when you were alive. Go ahead and express your rapture, grateful for my generosity."

At that moment, Kaito noticed an important difference in his body. He looked at his arm and found that the burns and lacerations covering it densely had disappeared. The constant pain that thoroughly gripped his body over the long years was gone.

(I see... What a shock. This body really isn't mine.)

Kaito understood completely. A body without pain could not possibly be his own body. This painless feeling, one that had been long-absent in his life, was quite comfortable, but at the same time, he could not help thinking he was like an inflated rubber doll.

While Kaito was feeling his arm in a daze, Elisabeth continued.

"To obtain a servant, I summoned *an innocent soul*. Although nothing prevents me from summoning an evil being to run errands for me, if the Church were to find out, punishment would be unavoidable. Furthermore, the brutality of your murder was beyond proportionate to your sin in life, hence you are perfect... Hmph, this rather strange feeling, could it be that you are from another world? To be drawn here from a parallel dimension, I really have no idea whether your unusual fortune is a blessing or a curse.

Whatever, I care not about your original identity. From now on, you shall work for me with sincere loyalty."

"I refuse."

"Oh?"

Kaito's answer caused Elisabeth to blink her red eyes with delight. She placed her finger, as slender as a blade, on Kaito's forehead, then licking her gorgeous lips, she whispered sweetly.

"You have been killed. Killed pitifully, tragically and brutally like a worthless bug. That low-functioning brain of yours can understand that much at least, yes? Although you are qualified as an 'innocent soul' by the condition that 'your sins from your past life did not deserve a cruel death,' your physiognomy predicts a destination of hell for you. Now that I have said this much, are you still going to give up your second life and seek death like a trampled bug?"

"That's right. I've had enough of living as someone else's plaything. I grew tired of living a long time ago."

Kaito replied firmly. This was how unmentionable his life had been, a fate worse than hell.

He had only attended school for a couple years before moving from place to place, forced to take on illegal jobs to help his father, but it was never appreciated. Whenever his father did not need him for manpower, he would be abused as a tool for venting frustrations. There was no part of this life that Kaito did not find repulsive. He did not even know what his mother looked like, but presumably, subjected to dual suffering from malnutrition and pain, his mother had lost the ability to think normally. Deprived of the will to even run away, she ended up killed.

Kaito wanted a body without pain but he would rather die than cater to another person's whims again, because even if such a shitty life could continue, it would just be a longer and smellier piece of shit.

"I'm tired. I give up. If you want a servant, find someone else."

"Is that so? Then I shall make you my butler against your wishes."

Elisabeth did not heed Kaito's answer at all. Kaito frowned deeply, but she shrugged lightly.

"It would be a hassle if the Church's pointless nose were to get wind of the fact that I summoned a servant. Making a new doll would take substantial trouble, hence it would be utterly ludicrous of me to go through all that sundry work to find a substitute errand boy. I do not have that kind of time, after all, I..."

At that moment, the door behind Elisabeth was blown away with a loud noise.

Like a joke in poor taste, the heavy door simply flew in the air and crashed next to her. Bits of wood flew past her face, but she did not even bat an eye in that direction. Kaito's eyes widened in shock as he looked towards the doorway in trepidation.

Over there was a rider on a giant horse.

The rider was carrying a terrifying spiked chain while straddling a saddle made of bones, but the most bizarre thing about them were their bodies. Whether the horse or the rider, neither had any skin. Like anatomy models, their muscles were exposed, with blood vessels visible on the surface and glistening fat, presenting the pink color of their bloody flesh... Such ugly bodies caused Kaito to

instinctively refuse to understand the entities before him. Only after a long while did Elisabeth turn to the entrance, speaking in a laid back manner.

"After all, there are fourteen ranked demons, namely, The Knight, The President, The Grand President, The Earl, The Grand Earl, The Duke, The Grand Duke, The Marquess, The Grand Marquess, The Monarch, The Grand Monarch, The Sovereign, The Grand Sovereign, and The Emperor. And with the exception of The Emperor, who has been captured, I must brutally execute these thirteen demons and their contractors."

The horse neighed and the rider howled. But what came out of those hollow mouths of bare flesh was ear-splitting noise as though a storm was blowing into broken musical instruments. Feeling the unpleasant vibrations on his eardrums, Kaito understood from the bottom of his heart.

Indeed, such a terrifying being could only be described as a demon.

"Hey, what's up with that guy? Is he 'The Knight' you mentioned?"

"You are quite calm for a squashed bug of an imbecile."

"This level of judgment is normal as long as the brain isn't atrophied."

"Unfortunately, this thing is merely The Knight's servant. Rather than the man himself who had entered a contract with a demon, he is someone who volunteered to become a subordinate. In other words, a small fry. But he was formerly human, indeed."

Listening to Elisabeth, Kaito involuntarily looked at the horse and rider again. That this thing was originally human, he could not

believe it at all, neither did he want to believe it. If a man volunteered to turn into this as she said, all he could think was that guy must be insane. Presumably guessing Kaito's thoughts, Elisabeth grinned.

"I understand. I understand very well. Very ugly, isn't it? Selling one's soul to a demon merely for the sake of obtaining power beyond human, finally abandoning one's original appearance... There is no greater ugliness than this, is there? Laugh as much as you like, I permit you to laugh. This is more than likely his ultimate wish—A clown's ultimate wish is to make others laugh, wouldn't you agree?"

Even as a taunt, her words were far too tactless. Even sharper howls were emitted from the rider's mouth. The high-pitched sound waves resembled a roar of rage, almost tearing eardrums, making Kaito cover up his ears.

The rider tightened the reins and kicked the horse's belly. The horse proceeded to shatter the floor with its hooves, instantly reaching top speed to close in, trying to smash Elisabeth to death in a direct collision.

"Small potatoes are unworthy of my sword—Iron Maiden."

Elisabeth whispered quietly and raised her hand. Immediately, red petals and darkness were released into the air from her fingertips, swirling in a vortex. With a thunderous crash, as though the vortex had penetrated space itself, a human-sized doll emerged from the floor.

Iron Maiden—was the name Elisabeth had used to call this elegant doll, a name that did not match its appearance.

Long soft hair draped over the doll's back like golden silk. The two eyes glowed blue like gemstones. A smile of tender love on its lips. The doll's arms were outspread in welcome, whereas the rider charged mercilessly.

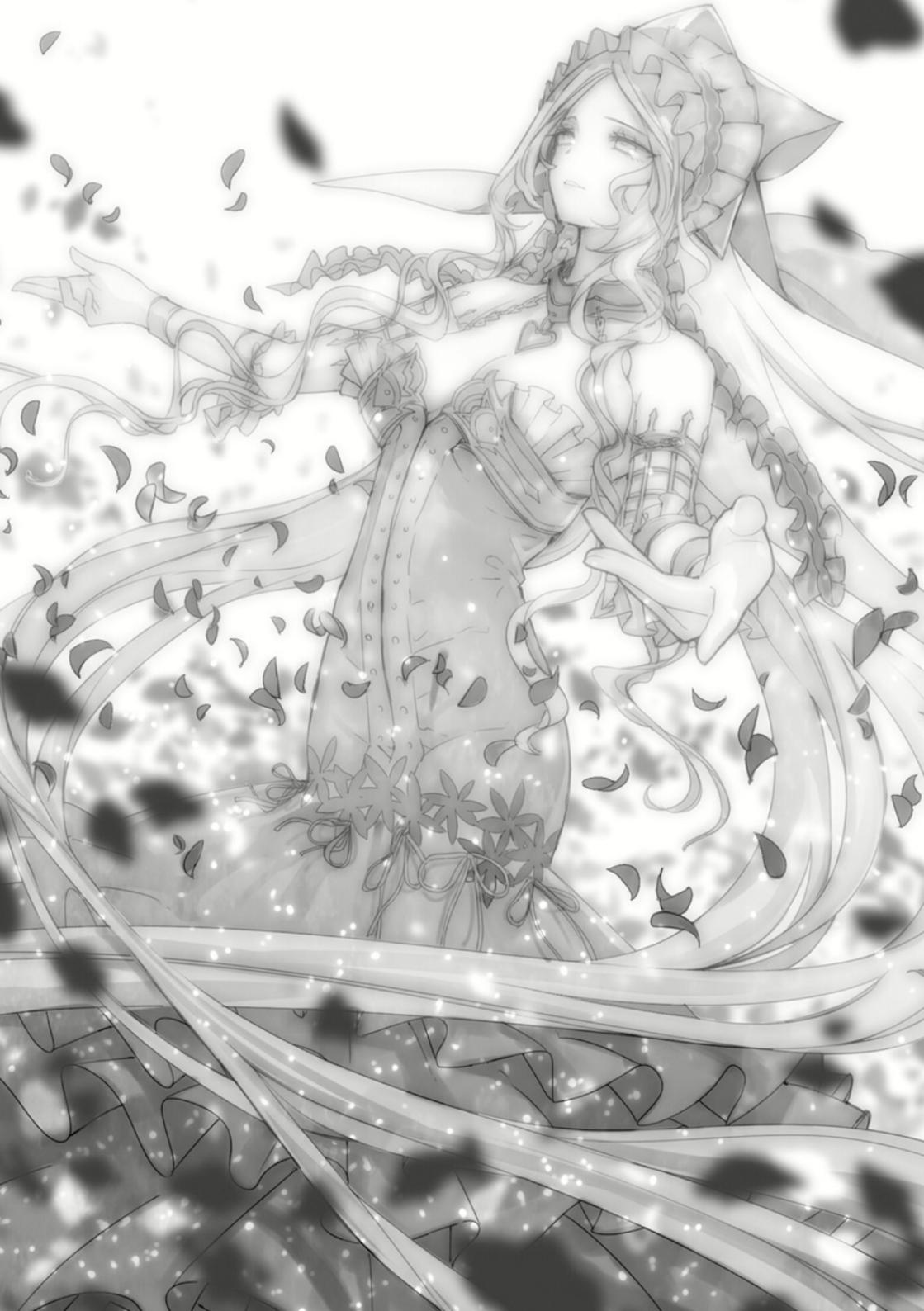
The maiden's warm embrace was about to be trampled by iron hooves... Just as Kaito made this prediction, he heard the sound of gears turning. The doll's eyes widened, rolling the blue eyes back to become burning red. Her offering of tender love rejected, the doll proceeded to show hatred on its face and opened up its belly suddenly.

Iron arms equipped with sharp claws rushed out from within, hurtling towards the horse and rider, mercilessly breaking their arms and legs with mechanical motions. Unconcerned with the enemy's pitiful screams, the iron arms compressed the horse and rider's body parts that were in the way, crushing them inwards until they were turned into a bloody pulp resembling pieces of caterpillars.

Without even time to resist, the horse and rider were turned into a meatball with heads, then dragged into the doll's belly. And the interior of the doll's belly featured a dense array of countless needles like symbols of maidenhood.

Gyahhh!

Accompanied by screams of pain, the doll's abdomen slammed shut.



Displaying a smile of tender affection again, the maiden hugged her lower abdomen tightly. One could hear sounds of mad struggling as well as screaming that could drive a listener insane.

"Those embraced by the Iron Maiden are not afforded an immediate death."

Amid the extremely terrifying screaming, Elisabeth commented nonchalantly. Turning her face towards Kaito, she grinned.

"If death is what you seek at all costs, then so be it. I shall generously grant you your wish. However, since I did bring you back from the abyss of death, if I had to kill you again, it must be done according to *my methods*. What are your thoughts? Make your choice, butler or meat?"

"Please let me be your butler."

"Now that is a rapid change of mind."

Thus, Kaito entered Torturchen's service.

This was how things came to be.

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"DIS-GUS-TING!"

With a soul-wrenching yell, the dish, a fork, and the "roasted heart with aromatic vegetables, paired with fruit sauce" flew into the air. A fatal rain was showered upon the ancient tablecloth.

Next, Elisabeth angrily stomped her foot on the dining table.

"W-What the devil is this? I never thought food could taste bad to this extent. It looked decent in appearance, but the inside of the heart was not cooked thoroughly, whereas the surface was too tough to chew. Rich in the distinct odor of innards, the sauce was strangely sweet and sour, producing an absolutely terrible symphony on the tongue that was impossible to dispel... In a certain way, it was a miracle."

"I'm amazed by your critique."

(I can't believe she gave such a vigorous reaction.)

With dead-looking eyes, Kaito plucked out the fork that was embedded in the wall.

A couple of days had passed since he was coerced into being Elisabeth's butler. Although he started out scared to death of Elisabeth's every move, he had spent a lifetime lingering on the brink of death, after all, so he was pretty much used to this type of interaction.

Dressed in a butler uniform that could hardly be considered a good match for him, Kaito sighed deeply.

"Can you not throw utensils around every chance you get? It's not like you're an old man from the Shouwa period."

"Whether Shouwa or old men, I have no idea what you are talking about. However, how can I not flip the table when the food is this disgusting!? Good grief! Even swine feed would be much better than this! How can your cooking skills be so bad!?"

"You've said the same thing to me countless times already, which is why I used wine to remove the odor today."

".....Hey, don't tell me you used *my* wine to make this kind of garbage?"

Kaito chose strategic silence. Seeing Kaito's guilt, Elisabeth silently waved her hand.

With a rumble, a chair appeared from under Kaito. As though in a cartoon scene, the chair rammed into his bottom then strapped him to the seat with belts. From its design, one could tell that spikes, spikes, and even more spikes would clearly emerge from the entire surface of the back rest, the seat and the arm rests. Abandoning all measure of composure, Kaito struggled as hard as he could.

"Hold on, wait a sec! Let's talk first! Think about this, don't you think you're asking for the impossible, forcing a novice to start with cooking internal organs right off the bat!?"

"You need not seek excuses. Incidentally, what is with your lack of respect for me, the one known as Torturchen? How brazen of you? Would turning your back into a sieve improve your arrogant attitude?"

"My senses towards fear and danger have numbed after I was killed once! It's my fault, please don't torture me!"

"Hmph, then I shall be merciful... Oops, I almost approved of you. But judging from the tone of your voice, aren't you insinuating indirectly that you have no reason to respect me except out of fear?"

"No, that's not true at all, err... I think?"

"Kaito, you cannot even be bothered to find an excuse now?"

"No, let me rephrase myself!"

Despite crying out, Kaito already knew his fate... Namely, to be turned into a human pincushion. However, Elisabeth apparently changed her mind and dismissed the torture chair with a "hmph."

"Very well, so be it, I am generous and forgiving, so I shall offer you a chance to redeem yourself—Make pudding for me."

"Pudding?"

Hearing Elisabeth solemnly issue an inexplicable order, Kaito cocked his head in puzzlement.

"Pudding indeed," Elisabeth repeated herself and nodded seriously. Crossing her legs conceitedly, she leaned back against her chair.

"It would be too unrealistic to rely on someone like you who cannot even cook a meal properly, so I was about to give up. However, the possibilities inherent in sweetness are slightly greater, so I shall allow you to make an attempt. If you tell me even this is beyond you, then I shall consider scrapping you as a garbage creating machine."

"Don't say something as frightening as scrapping a human being. You're making the wounds on my soul bleed. By the way, what is pudding? It does sound familiar... Uh, is it something like *purin*?"

"*Purin*? I know not of this *purin*, but judging from the name, is it not the same thing?"

Confronted with this extremely sloppy response, Kaito nodded. In fact, the custard pudding known as *purin* in Japan was something quite memorable for him.

One day, a woman who was cohabiting with Kaito's father had made pudding for the young Kaito. The woman had smiled shyly in front of the happy Kaito before disappearing the next day. Now that he thought back to the time, Kaito realized she had made the treat to alleviate her guilty conscience in leaving the young Kaito behind to escape on her own. However, to Kaito, his joy from back then remained a vivid memory. He had also memorized the somewhat unusual method of making the dessert.

The ingredients in the kitchen were sufficient to recreate the dish, but he lacked the right cooking utensil, so he asked Elisabeth.

"Hey Elisabeth, since you can use earth to make golems, doesn't that mean you can also make a clay pot?"

"How dare you make demands from the master who is considering to have you scrapped, do you not know your place...? Fine. What is this clay pot?"

"The clay pot is like this, a pot made from heat-resistant clay, it's round."

With clumsy language ability, Kaito tried to describe a clay pot. Elisabeth looked intrigued but proceeded to snap her fingers. Soon enough, tiny footsteps could be heard from the corridor.

Creak—

The dining hall door opened and a mini golem composed of rectangular earthen blocks appeared. Then the tiny golem waved and suddenly collapsed, leaving a small pile of earth.

"Ehhhh, hey Elisabeth, look what you've done! Isn't that so sad?"

"Pay it no mind. Despite appearances, it was not actually conscious. You wanted a pot, yes?"

The earth squirmed and formed a pot's shape. Kaito explained further, making the pot more shallow and adding a hole in the lid for letting off steam. The automatically shapeshifting clay finally turned into his familiar pot after repeated tries.

"This earth is imbued with fire resistance. This eludes my understanding, but take it and use it however you like."

"Thanks, this really helps."

Kaito picked up the pot gingerly in his arms and walked to the kitchen. He first filled the clay pot with water then added flour to cook. Doing so sealed the small hole at the top of the pot. Then using a smaller pot to boil milk, he dissolved white sugar in it then carefully added a beaten egg after it had cooled, taking care to avoid bubbles and frothing in the process. Next, he washed the clay pot and coated it with butter. Using a clean cloth, he filtered the egg mixture. However, the crucial step had yet to come, namely to cook gently with the lid on for around ten to fifteen minutes. Putting a

wire mesh over the stove, he placed the clay pot on top but he was not confident in fine-tuning the heat.

"Now then, how did it turn out... Hmm? It seems just right."

It looked like Elisabeth's application of fire resistance was superb. Even the thermal energy from the stove's fierce flames was transmitted as gentle heat. The rest of the process was now up to luck.

Soon after, a sweet fragrance began to fill the kitchen. After waiting for residual heat to dissipate, Kaito placed the clay pot in cold storage powered by an ice spirit spell. Once it had cooled down sufficiently, he took the clay pot out to the dining hall.

Elisabeth probably had nothing to do. Surprisingly, she was waiting patiently for Kaito.

"Hmm? I thought you ran away but you ended up returning. How unexpected."

"Yeah, thanks to you, I guess it's done. Try it out."

Kaito placed the clay pot before her. Elisabeth craned her neck, looking like she was waiting for Kaito to open it for her. Gripping the handle, Kaito lifted the lid, instantly releasing a burst of sweet fragrance. Seeing the large lump of light yellow substance, Elisabeth tilted her head in puzzlement.

"What is this? It is not pudding, is it?"

"Oh, I guess it's not the same thing after all. This is *purin*. *Purin*."

"Purin? Oh?"

Elisabeth repeated like a parrot and scooped up a small spoonful. Faced with the wobbling yellow substance, she frowned suspiciously.

She delivered the spoon to her mouth. After a moment's silence, the spoon moved again.

"This, how odd..... No..... Hmm..... Quite..... delicate..... smooth."

The spoon kept entering her mouth. Elisabeth began to eat ravenously nonstop. Soon after, the pot was empty. She slammed the spoon hard on the table.

"You are off the hook!"

"Thanks."

*See, you can do it if you try...* Elisabeth smiled contentedly. Kaito could not help but imagine a pair of cat ears popping out of her gorgeous black hair, moving smugly with satisfaction.

(...She's unexpectedly simple, even though she threatens others with torture at every opportunity.)

Just as Kaito was thinking that, she snapped her fingers. Kaito jumped in surprise, thinking she had read his mind and the torture chair was about to attack, and braced himself in a defensive stance.

However, what appeared before him was a glowing chessboard formed from red light, apparently created by Elisabeth's magic. Kaito widened his eyes in amazement and she said to him:

"Seeing that you are slightly useful, I shall bestow a little knowledge upon you, to help you understand your current situation."

With a wave of Elisabeth's pale hand, the chessboard spun and approached Kaito. Kaito could not help but lean back when the chessboard stopped in front of him. As though singing, Elisabeth continued:

"Rejoice as much as you can. Knowledge is very important, because the ignorant are nothing more than ants toyed with by fate. Only by acquiring knowledge could humanity surpass insects to become beasts, finally becoming human, and sometimes surpassing God."

Two large chess pieces appeared on the board, one black and one white. Both pieces featured wings. Pointing at the two pieces from above, Elisabeth said:

"In this world, God and demons exist. They reside in a higher dimension imperceptible to the unaided eyes of humans, but corroborated by certain members of the clergy, occult scholars and sorcerers, *their existence have been proven* beyond a doubt. But ultimately, 'God' and 'demons' are merely names given by humans out of convenience. Humans named as God the supernatural being that created the world and named as demons the supernatural beings that would destroy the world. Hence, according to this logic, demons are only capable of intervening in the mortal realm when God wishes to abandon the world. But there are exceptions... It is a separate matter when contractors are involved."

"Contractors?"

"A name given to people who use themselves as the medium to summon demons that are not supposed to exist in this dimension and form contracts with them. When a demon merges with its contractor, the contractor's physical body is warped into a bizarre shape as the price for acquiring the ability to use the demon's powers freely. Due to the difficulty in summoning them as well as the lack of vessels strong enough to withstand them, demons powerful enough to destroy the world have yet to manifest. Nevertheless, a portion of demons, wielding fearsome powers, have already been summoned to the human world."

The black piece crumbled a bit and fell off the board, turning into fourteen new chess pieces in a row. At the center of these chess pieces, featuring forms resembling beasts or lumps of flesh, one piece with a crown on its head was bound by chains.

"Fourteen humans have contracted with fourteen demons. The fourteen ranks of The Knight, The President, The Grand President, The Earl, The Grand Earl, The Duke, The Grand Duke, The Marquess, The Grand Marquess, The Monarch, The Grand Monarch, The Sovereign, The Grand Sovereign, and The Emperor are the names given by mankind to these demons, generally used to refer to the fourteen and the contractors who have merged with them. Furthermore, there is a different type of being, devotees who have sworn allegiance to demons and their contractors, thereby obtaining part of their powers."

In front of the fourteen chess pieces with bizarre appearances was a row of pawns. The fourteen grotesque pieces each placed their hand on the forehead of the pawn in front of them, causing the pawns to turn into ugly monsters as well. Elisabeth picked up one of them and said:

"The skinless rider you saw last time was precisely The Knight's devotee. Devotees of demon contractors—This description is quite a mouthful, so it is simply shortened to 'devotee'."

Elisabeth returned the piece to the board, then the fourteen bizarre chess pieces and the deformed pawns began to march forward.

"Demons would derive power from the laments of God's creations, especially human suffering. Hence, in this world, atrocities committed by demons and their devotees have spread across the land."

The chess pieces opened their mouths in unison and using ugly and disorderly teeth, they cruelly chewed up new pawns that had appeared. With a snap of her fingers, Elisabeth summoned a female chess piece to the other side of the board.

"The Church—a religious organization that worships God, who had possessed a human temporarily at one point, to guide the masses along the right path under God's will, protecting the peace and stability of the human world—has tasked me with hunting down the remaining thirteen demons apart from the captured Emperor. And this time, my opponent is The Knight."

Before Kaito's eyes, a horse-mounted chess piece walked out from among the grotesque pieces. Riding a red steed, clad in creepy armor, the piece charged at Kaito. At that moment, the female chess piece swung a sword glowing with red light at it.

"The Knight is the most insignificant among the fourteen demons, but to ordinary people, he is a nightmare."

Suddenly, the floor began to shake violently. Just before the sword struck The Knight, all the chess pieces disappeared together with the board.

Rumble, rumble... The castle shook intensely again. Elisabeth stood up elegantly. Ignoring the confused Kaito, she exited with a flutter of her skirt hem behind her. Kaito hastily followed.

Leaving the dining hall, Elisabeth walked along the corridor then placed her hand on the great entrance to the throne room and pushed hard, opening it.

At the same time, they were greeted by an intense stench of blood and flesh, as well as a bizarre noise like something was tearing and chewing raw meat.

Kaito timidly directed his gaze out of the hole in the wall. On top of the staked corpse of the beast was another animal. This beast was ravenously tearing away at the dead flesh with its gigantic jaws. Buried in the flank of the beast, a human face was crying tears while chewing on the flesh next to its mouth. Such a horrifying scene made Kaito gasp.

Elisabeth looked back and said openly with a faintly evil smile.

"This is the work of demons. I expected this and sure enough, a second one arrived."

"You knew it would come? You..."

"Since the beast did not decompose on its way here, the *materials* must originate from the village under the castle. When the demon attacked the village, the villagers were basically all slaughtered. However, even if 20% of the villagers managed to escape and the remaining 80% were used to create this sort of abomination, the first one was far too small. Hence, I reasoned there must be a second one."

(How can she nonchalantly go through this kind of reasoning as though nothing had happened?)

Kaito felt dizzy after listening to this answer that was the farthest thing from common sense.

At that moment, the beast roared.

Uraa!

Shaking the breasts hanging under its belly, the beast jumped and used its sharp claws to pierce the castle's exterior walls, causing the entire castle to shake violently. Stone dust was falling from overhead. The beast turned its eyes, wet with bloodthirst, towards Elisabeth.

Looking at the beast whose head had entered the hole in the wall, Elisabeth sighed lightly.

"My goodness... Although you were merely roped into this mess, you lot are surely pitiful."

Kuruuooooooooooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

"I shall be merciful and allow you to rest in peace sooner, at least."

Elisabeth snapped her fingers. Immediately, the ground exploded with countless iron stakes breaking out of the soil vertically, skewering the beast's abdomen in succession. In spite of that, the beast reached forward with its head, tearing its body in the process, trying to devour Elisabeth. However, a thousand iron stakes had mercilessly punctured the beast's belly.

There was a continuous series of thuds and a cloud of dust and smoke mixed with red petals rose like a storm. By the time it dissipated completely, only the collapsed corpses of two beasts remained with a pool of dark black blood slowly spreading on the ground.

"There may be lingering traces of The Knight's attack at the village. Off we go to have a look."

With a flutter of her hem, Elisabeth began to walk.

Chastising his trembling legs, Kaito chased after her.

\* \* \*

Elisabeth descended the staircase that led underground. The underground passage, echoing with mysterious moans, seemed like a labyrinth where monsters were lurking. In fact, Kaito would not be surprised if there really was some kind of creature kept down here.

She advanced without hesitation and kicked open a door to a vast room. Kaito peered inside from next to her.

The room had neither furniture nor windows. There was a massive magic circle on the floor.

On closer examination, the complicated pattern was flowing. The air inside the room was a heavy smell of blood like inside a human womb. Suddenly, Kaito realized that the magic circle was actually drawn in blood.

"This is a teleportation magic circle drawn using my blood. It provides transportation to anywhere in the world, as long as it is within my memories."

"Putting aside what it's made of, that's really convenient. We don't have anything like that where I come from."

"You hail from a world of advanced machinery, but do not underestimate magic. As my servant, you are also capable of using your own blood to summon certain things to your side."

"Just how much do you want me to bleed?"

"Go ahead and try it out when you have time."

"Please allow me to refuse firmly."

Side by side with Elisabeth, Kaito stepped onto the magic circle with trepidation. With a stomp of Elisabeth's heel, bright red petals floated up along the edge of the magic circle. These petals kept swirling and started to surround the two of them. The petals gradually melted, soon turning into a thick cylindrical wall,

bringing a heavy smell of blood again. By the time Kaito noticed, the red petals had all turned into blood.

Elisabeth stomped her foot again and the wall of blood fell heavily to the ground like the lowering of the curtain at the end of a performance. The scenery hidden behind it was exposed.

Presented before Kaito and Elisabeth was the remains of a battlefield.

This was the best description Kaito could use for the scene before their eyes.

There was a fiery blaze stretching as far as he could see. Between the burning buildings were countless dead bodies. This scene was quite similar to photographs of foreign war zones that Kaito had seen long ago. More than two hours must have elapsed between the first beast's creation and Kaito's arrival here with Elisabeth, but there were no signs of the blaze subsiding.

Kaito could feel greasy sweat breaking out on his forehead. Enduring the nasty stench of burning human remains and the heat radiation scorching his skin, he swept his gaze across the corpses in the fire.

A man whose upper body had turned to charcoal. An old woman whose head had been pulled off together with her spine. A woman with breasts torn off. A young man with only his face forcibly removed. A young child with both arms amputated, in a crawling

position on the ground in either an attempt to escape or a final struggle.

They had all been murdered cruelly, leaving not the slightest shred of human dignity on their corpses. Unlike the grotesque beasts that had attacked the castle, these human corpses were still within the realm of comprehension. Precisely because of that, the cruelty and horror of the scene could seep directly into Kaito's brain. The contents of Kaito's gut had already surged up to his throat, but he forcibly suppressed the wave of nausea.

This was hell. It was hell no matter how you looked at it, filled with the nastiest scenes one could imagine. Confronted with these scenes, Kaito could not help but find himself at a loss for words. By his side, Elisabeth spoke softly:

"As I said just now, this is the work of demons."

She took a step forward then immediately turned around. With her back to the flames, her black hair fluttering in the wind, she said to Kaito:

"Through human pain and suffering, demons derive power from tormenting the soul. This is precisely the means by which they gain power. However, what you witness here is actually a relief. Instances of hell, more horrific than this, are currently appearing all over the world in succession."

Kaito was shocked by these revelations. Long accustomed to pain and injury, he was well aware that terror and unbelievable tragedy would suddenly descend upon humans. However, to think that such horrific scenes were being created in this world and people were slaughtered so pitifully... He was completely reluctant to accept such a reality.

"You're saying... this counts as a relief? Hey, don't joke around! This is hell no matter how you look at it!"

"Hell is divided into circles. This one here is not very deep, no different from a field of flowers in my eyes. Even more horrifying hells are created by demons... Hence, that is why the Church employs the sow that is I to take care of those pigs."

"Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

A roar of rage interrupted Elisabeth. Starting from there, a group of male villagers rushed out of chicken coops and pig sties that were about to collapse. Their clothing were smoked pitch black. Gripping their farm tools nervously, they surrounded Kaito and Elisabeth.

From among them, a knight on an armored horse stepped out.

Seeing the "knight" and the "horse," Kaito's expression tensed. However, there was a decorative feather on the knight's helmet. His bright armor was engraved with patterns of lilies while the horse was also decorated with the same emblem. It looked like he was a legitimate soldier from this world.

Seeing the knight had his sword drawn and held high, Elisabeth scoffed lightly.

"What is this, a knight of the kingdom I see. What business do you have with me, raising that clumsy and heavy piece of scrap metal of yours?"

"Don't play dumb! I was sent to this village from the royal capital and I have monitored your every move at the castle on the hill. Finally, you have revealed your true colors! I saw clearly from the

start! This scene of tragedy and horror here are all done by your hand!"

"Are you retarded? Did you not see that The Knight was responsible for this? Whatever, the likes of you would never figure out what happened here exactly unless in a direct encounter. However, please do not blame me for your incompetence. Tasked by the Church, I am currently hunting demons and this position forbids me from killing humans."

"Vile nonsense! Do you think I'd believe such lies?"

The knight's voice was unusually vicious, causing Kaito to narrow his eyes slightly. The knight pointed his sword at Elisabeth. His throat trembling with rage, he roared angrily at Elisabeth.

"Don't tell me you have forgotten all that you have done in the past!?"

Elisabeth neither confirmed nor denied, simply putting on an expression of bored indifference. Faced with her attitude, the knight apparently reached the end of his patience and began a raging tirade.

"Without showing mercy to a single inhabitant of your territory, you tortured every last one of them. Ripping their bodies open, you tore out their innards while they were alive, sewing up every orifice on their body, making carvings on their bones, melting their flesh, gouging out eyeballs, ripping out tongues, slaughtering men, women, the elderly and the young in every manner possible! In the end, you did not even spare the nobles! Torturchen! Elisabeth Le Fanu! Who would ever believe your vile lies!"

This diatribe caused Kaito to confront the truth that he had been ignoring for the past few days.

He recalled the scene of which he had caught a faint glimpse just before his death. Corpses utterly deprived of human dignity were piled into a mountain. The crowd was shouting repeatedly to kill. The smile of the girl who was tied up.

Right now, Elisabeth was smiling while she listened to the knight as though she were enjoying a little bird's song.

"Especially given what I witnessed at the Field of Impalement, don't tell me you have forgotten what you have done to us, our knightly order!? Do you know how many nights I spent unable to sleep after I returned the kingdom as a survivor!?"

The knight's hand, gripping the sword, began to shake faintly. However, he stopped at this point and suddenly looked towards Kaito. The knight's armor rattled as he asked Kaito in weary and perplexed voice.

"Why are you together with that demon of a woman? Rumors say that Elisabeth is looking for a servant... If you were forced to serve her, then come to my side. I will protect you."

Kaito looked at Elisabeth. She simply had her arms crossed without saying anything.

Kaito was definitely reborn against his will and coerced into serving her. He had also witness Elisabeth's atrocities. It would be great if he could live peacefully in this parallel dimension. If he was going to escape, now would be the time. Kaito took a step forward but immediately halted.

"What's the matter? Hurry and come over."

"I would gladly accept what you offer, but may I ask a question?"

"What is it?"

"You... Why are you staring at me as though you're *looking at tasty food?*"

The instant Kaito spoke, an unnatural silence began to spread. Holding farm tools, the men looked at the knight uneasily, but the knight did not speak. Staring straight at him, Kaito continued:

"In my past life, I have met many bastards who enjoyed abusing children on a basis more regular than their meals. Your current gaze is identical to theirs."

The knight did not answer, but next to Kaito, Elisabeth's shoulder suddenly began to shake mildly. Finally, she started to roar with laughter. Holding her stomach as though she honestly found things hilarious, she squirmed seductively.

"I get it now, so that is what is happening. First of all, there is you, huh? Never did I expect from within the order itself, how truly ludicrous—Hey, proud knight there, listen carefully to me, will you?"

Elisabeth's smile was innocent and pure.

With her red eyes shining with delight, she spoke in a gentle voice that could coax a cat.

"On that Field of Impalement, I skewered five hundred knights from your order, armor and all, wiping them out completely.

Massacred. Annihilated. However, I do not recall there being any survivors."

At that point, she withdrew her smile. Glaring coldly, she asked:

"Why are you still alive?"

At that moment, the men wielding farm tools all had their heads sent flying. Every head had their mouths gaped open, their expression locked in surprise, falling on the ground. Countless flies surged out from the wounds, using their tiny legs to move the men's bodies, then starting to attach them together. These flies were using their tiny jaws to chew up the dead bodies' flesh and sticking the skin together using their saliva, gradually assembling a mini version of the beasts Kaito had seen at the castle.

Presented with the bizarre scene before him, Kaito held his breath and backed away. Finally, the knight was enveloped entirely in blue flames. Burning in ice-cold flames, the horse's skin gradually lost all color of blood and the knight's body gradually expanded. The bulging muscles under the armor were exceptionally developed, causing the armor to swell up like a balloon. From the gaps in the set of armor that had turned round like a ridiculous doll, long white hair and a long beard fell out. Within a brief moment, the knight had turned into an elderly rider with a bizarre appearance.

Completely fearless, Elisabeth stared at the imposing demon *knight* and clicked her tongue.

"I know not whether you were trying to make me careless or attempting to eat my servant in front of me, but regardless, it is utterly ridiculous. Having changed your appearance, you should not have wasted your breath on words and blown your cover. After obtaining immortality from a demon contract, did you learn nothing at all from the Field of Impalement? Oh dear..."

Elisabeth sighed deeply but immediately nodded with comprehension.

"Sigh, precisely because of that, you were only able to merge with a lowly demon like The Knight."

The Knight roared in anger, spurring the bloodless horse to charge at Elisabeth. His speed was far beyond that displayed by the devotee last time. Releasing flames and thunder around him, The Knight caught a blue thunderbolt with his hand and transformed it into a massive lance, thrusting it straight at Elisabeth.

Elisabeth did not dodge and was easily pierced by the lance.

Almost screaming out, Kaito's voice was stuck in his throat. The ugly giant lance creaked inside Elisabeth's body, gradually embedding into her belly. From the gap in the hole, crimson blood was dripping out. Next, The Knight violently withdrew the lance from her body, tossing her delicate body hard on the ground.

In the next instant, a scene from Kaito's mind... was reenacted.

Beaten up, he was smashed into a wall before falling on the ground like a rag.

"Elisabeth."

Kaito was about to rush over but halted. Elisabeth was laughing. As though things could not be more funny, she was roaring with laughter, holding her stomach in a pool of blood.

"Kuku, heehee, hahahahahahaha, ha—Hahhahhahhahhahhah, ah..."

While panting painfully, she stood up. The hole in her belly offered a view of her interior. Dripping with blood all over, she coiled up the remaining half of her intestines in her hand then tossed it aside.

"I see now, this tickling feeling is quite nice, but it is a far cry from the pain of incinerating a soul. What I call pain is supposed to be something like this."

Elisabeth raised her hand up to the sky. A huge amount of red petals and darkness swirled around her, enveloping her body, turning into new black fabric to plug up the hole in her body. Then inside the giant vortex of red and black, she picked up something.

"Rejoice, fool. I am drawing my sword for you."

Elisabeth drew out a longsword. Red as though drenched with blood, the blade was shining ominously.

"Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl!"

Elisabeth called out the sword's name, instantly causing words carved on the blade to glow. The meaning of those words instantly crashed into his mind as soon as Kaito saw the light.

*You shall obtain freedom through action. Pray for God to become your savior. The beginning, the process and the end, all are within God's palm.*

"Come, let us begin to play!"

Elisabeth sliced through the air, aiming at those armored arms. A silver-white chain was released from the trail of her slash, entangling The Knight's armored arms, dragging him off his horse to suspend him in midair through unbelievable brute force. However, The Knight snapped his fingers, causing the beast to pounce at Elisabeth from behind. Without turning her head, Elisabeth simply swung her sword.

The beast was entangled by a chain and restrained. The human flesh forming the beast's body made terrifying sounds while being sliced by the chain. Then the chain wrapped around the partially collapsed mass of meat, reshaping it to create new horses. Next, the chain entangled the bloodless horse and started controlling it like a set of reins.

Elisabeth raised her sword high towards the sky. Immediately, the ends of countless chains swirled in a vortex, flying at The Knight. After the storm passed, four chains were wrapped around The Knight's limbs, tying him to four horses, including one of which was his own steed. The Knight desperately yelled something to his mount, but the horse did not listen to him at all.

"I hereby present—Dismemberment."

As Elisabeth swung her sword down, the four horses galloped at the same time.

Under incredible tension, The Knight's four limbs creaked. Joints were dislocated, muscles were stretched taut, making noises just as they reached their limit, breaking under the strain. Blood gushed out from gaps in the armor, but the four horses did not stop. The Knight began to scream like mad.

"Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!  
Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

His voice conveyed not only pain but pure rage as well.

Elisabeth approached The Knight. Kaito followed closely and was immediately shocked. Under the helmet, The Knight's eyes had returned to a human's gaze. Completely unlike the gaze directed at Kaito earlier, these blue eyes were frighteningly clear, glaring at Elisabeth with a deadly grudge against an unforgivable enemy.

The man who had contracted with The Knight was still quite young.

Gazing down at what were originally quite noble eyes, Elisabeth spoke softly with a gentle expression.

"Are you a survivor of the Field of Impalement? How much pain, how much hatred you must be bearing."

"Elisabeth... Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeth..."

"—Nevertheless, I must apologize. The demon's voice is as much an affront to one's hearing as the noise of swine."

Elisabeth smiled maliciously. Filled with regret and the desire to kill, The Knight roared loudly.

"Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

What followed was the sound of tearing flesh and The Knight was dismembered alive. Tied to the horses, his arms and legs were dragging on the uneven ground. From a rip reaching deep into the abdomen, out fell his innards all at once. The mouth under the helmet kept spewing blood before he finally breathed his last. Then blue flames began to quietly envelop The Knight's body.

"Let us return. That whatever *purin* was quite delicious, but I am hungry again no thanks to him."

Elisabeth turned her sword into red petals and walked away. Staring at her back, Kaito recalled the scene he had witnessed when she first summoned him as well as what The Knight had been shouting. He knew that reckless prying could lead to painful torment. After some thinking, in the end, Kaito still asked Elisabeth quietly:

"Say, was that guy speaking the truth just now? Did you torture all the people in your territory before slaughtering them, not even sparing the nobles?"

"Indeed, it is true, there was no a single lie mixed in the allegations. The unmistakable truth. Who do you take me for? I am 'Torturchen' Elisabeth Le Fanu. I am the woman who tormented people to death more brutally than anyone, then captured by the Church and tasked with the mission to slaughter thirteen individuals."

Elisabeth replied without hesitation. It was a harsh and shameful truth that could very well rival the demons. Recalling her cat-like

smile when she was eating pudding, Kaito felt betrayed for some inexplicable reason. Faced with this girl, a plunderer who subjected people to all manner of torment, he expressed undisguised revulsion on his face. However, there was an unexpected continuation to Elisabeth's confession of sin.

"Furthermore, I am the woman who shall face death by fire once I have executed all my targets."

She asserted firmly and matter-of-factly. Kaito widened his eyes. Elisabeth was staring straight back at Kaito with her crimson eyes, as clear as rubies. On that calm face of hers was not the slightest shred of pretense.

Words from before flashed through Kaito's mind.

*At least do a little good before you die.*

Was that what it was supposed to mean? Still showing a face of indecision, Kaito did not know how to accept this truth. He fell silent. Elisabeth scoffed and stood at the center of her teleportation magic circle.

"Cook a new meal for me when we return. Since you are capable of controlling sweetness with such finesse, you could not possibly lack

talent in cooking. Should you fail to serve up something decent, I shall treat you to the dunking stool next time."

Following her into the magic circle, Kaito paused for a moment and turned around.

Behind them was a scene that could only be described as hell. Screams could be heard from afar. Chicken coops and pig sties had already collapsed. The blaze was burning stronger and stronger. Remembering The Knight's bizarre appearance, he muttered:

"So there are twelve more like him, huh..."

Kaito walked over to Elisabeth's side and she stomped her heel.

After the two of them vanished, The Knight's lance burned up in blue flames, turning into ash that scattered in the wind.

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## Chapter 2 - A Game of Hell

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After being forced to acclimatize himself to this world and his bizarre situation, Kaito came to understand a couple of things.

To avoid confusing souls, the golem body created by Elisabeth was equipped with automatic translation functionality using the soul's own knowledge as a foundation. As a result, Kaito was able to understand the language in this alternate world. Not only could he speak it but he was also to understand the main gist of what people said. However, the rules governing this kind of conversion were rather fluid.

Certain specialized terms spoken by Elisabeth came from ancient language and were not found in the alternate world's lingua franca. These words would then sound like a foreign language to Kaito's ears. Furthermore, for many things, even if the names were the same, they might represent different objects in each world. Take for example, the seasonings in this world. Putting aside the most basic ones such as sugar, salt and pepper, due to the excessive differences in customs and sensibilities between the two worlds, trying to use seasonings as though they were from his original world would be a recipe for disaster.

"And that's why my cooking tastes bad."

"No, the poor taste of the food you prepare has already reached the realm of art. This cannot be the only reason."

With arms bound in chains, suspending him from the dining hall's ceiling as though he were a prisoner, Kaito was explaining himself to Elisabeth. However, Elisabeth insisted with disappointment that it was Kaito's own fault, shaking her head while sitting on a cabriole-leg chair.

The remains of the "grilled pig kidney paired with fresh salad" made by Kaito were spilled on the floor. There was sharp spike protruding from the ground. A slight lowering of the chains and Kaito's right foot would fall upon it.

This was a very simple and classic method of torture. Shaking his body, Kaito protested.

"Stop making that disappointed look! At the end of the day, it's by your whim that my fate is decided! Please don't do this, I promise I'll do anything you want."

"I am completely baffled whether your attitude counts as defiance or not... You are too useless. Were it not for your ability to make pudding, I would have scrapped you directly without bothering to torture you."

"I never thought pudding would save my life."

"Hmph, be grateful to pudding."

(Good heavens...)

Kaito was in shock but Elisabeth nodded contentedly.

At that moment, Kaito suddenly thought of something. Elisabeth's outfit was quite revealing for starters, with only leather straps to cover up the vital bits, practically exposing most of her breasts. And right now, Kaito's perspective was from a high angle.

From his vantage point, Kaito could even see down her cleavage all the way to the deepest part.

"Elisabeth, uh... Miss Elisabeth? Isn't this a bit dangerous?"

"Hmm? What are you talking about? .....Hmm, you are dead!"

"You're pretty much the one who exposed yourself, okay!? I simply pointed it out to you, so that's way unreasonable of you! The same goes for the cooking issue. Didn't you say my food was great last time, after we returned from the village where The Knight rampaged? That's when I skewered slices of liver and roasted them with pepper and salt!"



"That counts as cooking in your mind, is that so?"

"It doesn't count?"

"Of course not."

Elisabeth was about to snap her fingers when Kaito appealed to her pity with pleading puppy dog eyes, but she simply scoffed. Just as Kaito braced himself for sharp pain...

"Hmm? Isn't this the Meat Supplier?"

"Whoa!"

Elisabeth suddenly dispelled the chains binding Kaito's arms. Kaito resigned himself to death but the spike under him had also disappeared. While Kaito was stunned on the ground, unable to get up, Elisabeth already stood up gracefully to welcome someone. Kaito turned to look at the dining hall's entrance and jumped in surprise.

A strange man shrouded all over in black cloth was lugging a heavy blood-soaked sack, standing there. From gaps in the swaying fabric, Kaito could catch brief glimpses of the sharp claws and scales on the man's feet.

Extending her hand, Elisabeth gestured towards Kaito, who finally managed to get up, to introduce him.

"It would be a breach of etiquette to punish a servant in front of a guest. Kaito, feel grateful to the Meat Supplier. Meat Supplier, this dim-witted servant is the one who turns the fresh innards you deliver into kitchen trash every time."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Milord Dim-witted Servant. I am your friendly neighborhood Meat Supplier, the friend of gourmets and customers with peculiar tastes. I am utterly grateful to Milady Elisabeth's patronage every time. So long as it is *meat* and only limited to *meat*, I am certain to provide satisfaction to your every need and desire."

"Uh... Thank you for your dedicated service."

Kaito showed hesitation on his face. Putting aside the Meat Supplier's appearance, his self-introduction was also filled with dangerous signals. Seeing Kaito's expression, the Meat Supplier seemed to have a thought, scratching his face through the black fabric.

"Oh dear, it is true that my appearance is quite out of this world, even for a demi-human. Even I have no idea what is my primary ancestry. However, I am no different from the other demi-humans you know, so there is no need to be so surprised."

"Demi-humans... Uh, I think I've heard of them from video games or something... A race, right?"

"Ah, so there are no demi-humans in your world, I see. Do not be concerned, Meat Supplier, he is actually someone from a parallel dimension, an extremely lost soul. Just leave lost souls be."

"As you wish. Please confirm the merchandise as per our custom."

The Meat Supplier nodded and turned to Elisabeth again. Taking out the fresh internal organs from his sack, one after another, he presented them individually to Elisabeth before returning them to the sack.

"Chicken and pigeon gizzards, pig intestines, cow tongue and heart. If there are no problems, I shall move them to the ice spirit magic storage."

"Your efforts are much appreciated."

"Let me confirm something, you don't eat human organs, right?"

"Of course not. Human flesh is disgusting and completely unfit for consumption. Why would I waste good money on purchasing it?"

"Ah, assuming it is being used as food."

Kaito could not help but fall silent. Including this transaction in process, there was a heavy menacing air hanging over everything. However, the Meat Supplier suddenly announced as though he had thought of something.

"Human flesh is quite sour and there is a great variation in flavor across different individuals, so there is quite a large market consisting of customers with a penchant for that. Currently, the price is relatively cheap, so if Milord Butler would like to have a try, I highly recommend it. What are your thoughts? Would like to open the gate to an entirely new diet?"

"No thanks, I don't thank that kind of door should be opened."

"My, what serious words."

"No thank you."

"Hmm? Did you say cheap? I have not heard of war breaking out in nearby villages. From where did you acquire the bodies?"

"Well, in a certain territory, there are many bodies in the cemetaries of villages and the moats of castles. The most delicious parts of those bodies have all gone missing. As the Meat Supplier, I find that quite unfortunate, but it has made the procurement of ingredients much easier. Are you interested? Barbecue made from the rib portion is quite worth a try."

Listening to the Meat Supplier, Kaito and Elisabeth could not help but exchange glances. They silently committed to memory, if one day a great number of corpses surfaced with missing parts, this guy must surely be the culprit.

"Hey, Meat Supplier, I suspect this might be the work of demons."

At a loss, the Meat Supplier scratched his head in embarrassment.

"As the Meat Supplier, I am ashamed to say that I am completely unconcerned about everything and anything apart from the quality of meat."

Kaito narrowed his eyes in disgust and said:

"Yeah, there are definitely people like that. I've met many of them in my previous life."

Putting this aside, Kaito and Elisabeth inquired of the location of the territory from the Meat Supplier and decided to make their way there.

\* \* \*

"To think I even remember this kind of remote little town, I cannot help but marvel in amazement at how good my own memory is!"

".....I am more amazed that you had the self-awareness to get changed."

The two of them had gone to a back alley in the destination town. With arms akimbo, Elisabeth was exclaiming energetically. The surprising thing was that she was currently wearing a proper dress.

The corsetted design accentuated her narrow waist while the flounced skirt was adorned with several gorgeous ribbons. Her hair was done up and decorated with lovely flowers.

Fabric of pure white, paired with a noble face, it was like cheating.

Transformed into a lovely noble woman, Elisabeth puffed out her chest proudly.

"Hmph, I am plenty smart. The commoners are still carrying on with their everyday lives and the demon has yet to show himself. I am well aware that I need to dress accordingly when coming to a place like this. However, although I have taken the guise of an endearing well-bred woman, you still look like a dog dressed in human clothing with that butler uniform on you, fufu."

"Who cares about that! In that case, why can't you find me a more fitting set of clothes... Hey, Elisabeth."

Ignoring Kaito's grumbling, Elisabeth strode ahead. From the dark alley, she approached the main road with Kaito following frantically behind her. The voices of vendors promoting their wares were mixed with the noise and footsteps of the crowd, coming at them like a wall of sound.

Stepping out, Kaito arrived in a town in a foreign country.

More precisely, this was another world. However, the colorful scene, featuring the noise of many people talking to one another, complicated smells, all this matched the "foreign feel" that Kaito had experienced from movies a long long time ago.

Elisabeth turned towards the stunned Kaito, causing the decorative flowers on her hair to sway, then smiled radiantly.

"I suppose I ought to say this once. 'Welcome to another world.'"

Gold paired with blue, black paired with gray, red paired with green... There were all kinds of hair and eye colors in the people moving about.

A woman wearing a shawl walked past a man dressed in a shirt with pants held by suspenders. Close by, a girl in a dirndl-style dress was selling flowers and a man in frock coat was smoking a pipe.

Among the multitude of vendors and stores were things Kaito recognized as well as many goods that he had never seen before. Translucent medicine bottles with artistic shapes. Sweet smelling pink leaves that were apparently for wrapping tobacco. Fruit resembling bird eggs were being sold alongside apples.

A massive gong sounded and a black-haired youth was holding a big ladle in his reptilian hand, serving fried rice with pieces of slightly reddened meat to customers. The dish looked quite tasty

but had a distinctive strong odor. Most of the customers eating the fried rice had dog ears and tails.

"Reptilian arms and dog ears?"

"Hybrids between demi-humans and beast folk are not rare at all. This is because the immigration of other races is a major issues in poor neighborhoods. They make up roughly 30% of the population in slums and this surpasses 40% in the north. However, the ones with completely different appearances from humans are pure-blooded demi-humans and beast folk nobility, so you will not be seeing them in human territories. It would be a problem if you jumped in surprise at the slightest thing, so please get used to it."

"What the heck... So this really is another world."

"Furthermore, trying out fruit requires you to pay for it, so refrain from doing that carelessly."

Kaito almost accepted a honeyed grape from an old woman and frantically withdrew his hand. However, Elisabeth picked up a fresh and juicy berry to pop in her mouth, then casually flicked a copper coin into the vendor's hand.

Elisabeth was holding her head high, striding openly through the crowd. Sellers were shouting, customers were haggling, skinny dogs and rats were scurrying at people's feet... Amid such a scene, Elisabeth's slender figure of pure white was so striking. However, she was not concerned at all. The crowd would naturally avoid and make space for her too.

"Hey Elisabeth, where are you going?"

"Mind your own business. For the moment, just keep your mouth shut and follow me."

Kaito obeyed and stayed behind her. Just as Kaito was starting to suspect whether Elisabeth was simply wandering aimlessly, the appearance of the surrounding shops began to change.

Gone were the stores, the seats of roadside eateries and large carts, leaving only filthy little stalls in sight. There was also a clear decrease in merchandise quality. Judging from this, this area was probably where transactions took place for the likes of not-so-fresh perishable food, illegal drugs and weapons.

Between warehouses built from stone, they found many people drinking soup made from unknown ingredients. Elisabeth stopped walking. At the same time, Kaito overheard a certain term.

"I hear that the Marquess of Blood is recruiting servants again."

Surprised, Kaito turned his gaze to a gray-haired old woman. The old woman had been walking along the street, selling herbs from a small box at her side. She was now chatting with a couple of women who seemed to know one another well.

"I thought people stopped selling children to that castle when it was rumored that they ate them?"

"Are you talking about Anna...? I heard she sold her fourth son for a piece of silver."

"Giving children away just because there's silver, is there no justice? That being said, I can't believe she sold her precious son just like that. As expected of that greedy sellout. I'll bet next time round, she won't balk at selling her fifth daughter for a piece of gold."

"At least it's much better than ending up in a brothel. From what I've heard, the Marquess has even gathered children from impoverished lesser nobles to serve him recently. Getting eaten aside, if it's just doing menial labor, it might be possible for them to earn perks whenever they please the Marquess."

"The carriage of the old woman who recruits servants has been here today too. I wish I were younger."

"You're as ugly as a monster. Hell's gonna freeze over before anyone buys you."

The relatively younger woman made a rabbit ears gesture and grinned with exposed yellow teeth.

Elisabeth nodded and walked towards them. Hearing the acute sound of her heels, the women looked up in surprise, staring at Elisabeth as though they were looking at something strange. Kaito could feel viscous hostility from them and hastily followed Elisabeth's white silhouette.

"Hold on a sec, Elisabeth. Where are you going?"

"A large number of dead bodies have turned up without causing a riot. This implies that the majority of victims were the poor. Even if left alone, the poor would randomly die on their own from the cold, drowning, hunger or disease. A mere dozen or so people going missing would not be enough to cause an uproar."

"Why are you putting things in such a terrible way?"

"Facts are facts regardless whether I hold back my words or assert frankly. Hence, that is why you felt compelled to come here to gather information, and sure enough, we obtained the desired information. Fortune has been favorable so far... Ah."

Elisabeth stopped at a corner. A black horse-drawn carriage was parked in front of a collective residence built from red brick. A well-dressed old woman had stopped a mother and young daughter, speaking fervently about something. However, the mother shook off the old woman's grip on her shoulder and rushed upstairs, escaping to her room. The old woman clicked her tongue in displeasure and prepared to return to her carriage.

"Does this carriage belong to the Lord Marquess? How wonderful! My name is Flora. Hearing that the Lord Marquess is hiring maidservants, I came to apply for the job. My father is a great landowner but we are on poor terms, so I snuck out secretly to enjoy myself, never expecting to encounter such a marvelous opportunity! It is my greatest wish to live like a true lady! I implore you to take me along so as to serve by the Lord Marquess' side!"

Kaito stared with widened eyes at Elisabeth as though she had gone mad, but she acted as though she did not know him, simply inclining her head with an innocent expression. Even so, the old woman still directed a gaze of suspicion at Elisabeth. In return, Elisabeth smiled like a flower and said:

"Oh, I almost forgot. I met Miss Anna on the main street earlier and she made a friendly recommendation, bidding me to mention that she is the one introducing me to the job."

Hearing this, the old woman smiled radiantly and nodded. She cautiously inquired of Elisabeth the name of the landowner she had mentioned as well as whether her escape from home had been discovered, before hastily opening the carriage's door.

Pushing Kaito and Elisabeth onto the carriage, the old woman issued orders to the driver as though fleeing in a rush. The carriage began to speed off immediately. Kaito glanced secretly at Elisabeth from the corner of his eye.

Next to the smiling old woman, there was an even more evil grin on her face.

Leaving town, the carriage went past a field of wheat on the right then entered a riverside road. After continuing for a while, a massive castle build on the narrow river bank came into view.

The castle was constructed from yellow sandstone and gray rock without any unity in appearance. The thick and sturdy walls, supported by cylindrical towers, extended east and west. The castle's reflection in the water was like a giant crow with outspread wings, staring at the river surface.

Crossing the drawbridge over the moat, the carriage entered the castle.

Thus, Kaito and Elisabeth arrived at the castle belonging to the Marquess of Blood.



Perhaps due to the current castle lord's preferences, the interior of the castle was lavishly and vividly decorated in contrast to its dull exterior. Featuring a grand staircase, the great hall was illuminated by a shining luxurious chandelier with the floor covered by a carpet with gold and silver thread. Judging from the carved banisters and the plaster sculptures of vineyard patterns decorating the walls, every object was created with exquisite craftsmanship.

Everything in view had been acquired by sparing no expense in wealth and labor.

(Rich people's homes are so different.)

Kaito could not help but narrow his eyes in disdain. Following after Elisabeth, he passed through the hall and was about to enter the passage on the right when suddenly, a brawny man guarding the entrance grabbed his shoulder violently.

"You're no noble, right? Go that way."

"Eh? Hold on, Eli—Lady Flora!"

Dragged away, Kaito screamed out. Elisabeth turned her head back gently and made a thumbs-up gesture at him, probably implying "Figure things out for yourself, okay? Since your body is immortal, don't give up, you are a capable lad." That being said, Kaito was already used to her momentary whims and fancies.

By this point, there was no helping it. With a twitching expression, Kaito gave up and followed the man. The man raised a flag with an

embroidered emblem hanging in the left passage to reveal a hidden entrance behind the flag. Following the stone built passage that was lit by torches, Kaito's suspicions grew stronger and stronger.

Soon after, the man stopped in front of a *genuine* prison.

"Get your ass in there."

"Why am I treated like this suddenly with no warning!?"

—I might as well play along and protest, deriving some psychological comfort too.

However, Kaito's complaints fell on deaf ears and the man simply kicked him into the cell. Kaito yelped lightly and looked up, only to see that there were boys and girls of humans, beast folk and demi-humans in the unexpectedly spacious prison.

The children, of varying ages and races, were all showing fearful expressions. This was a troubled look of not knowing how to react, a very familiar expression to Kaito. After racking his brains for a moment, Kaito raised a hand, hoping to calm them down.

"Uh, hi."

"Kyah!"

Suddenly, another person was kicked into the prison. A girl dressed in a soft red dress resembling a poppy. She crashed into Kaito and fell. Kaito hastily caught her. The girl's lustrous brown curly hair fluttered. Matching her brown hair well were her chestnut-brown eyes that stared timidly at Kaito. She was a girl with a plain but endearing face. Noticing that she was being held tightly in another's arms, she blushed intensely then straightened her posture.

"F-Forgive me for embarrassing myself. My name is Melanie Esclough, daughter of Earl Esclough. What on earth is this place...? According to my aunt, I was sent here to work so as to learn the ways and customs of nobles."

"I'm Sena Kaito..... Uh, excuse me if I'm being rude by asking this question. Could it be that your father passed away, so you were adopted by your aunt and then imprisoned here?"

"Eh? How did you know, Lord Kaito? Do you happen to know my aunt by any chance?"

"Ah, well... As much as it pains me to tell you this, I've got to warn you first. You and I are currently in a very dangerous situation, so best prepare yourself. Just run away if anything happens. I'm not too sure how terrifying things will get either."

"Oh no... What on earth is going on? What will happen to me, you, and all these children?"

"I haven't got a clue, but I know that shock can render people unable to react immediately, so it's best to be mentally prepared at least."

"Come out, you are summoned."

Kaito was interrupted and the cell door was opened. Together with the children who began to cry in fear, Kaito was escorted out of the cell by several men. Kaito, a red-haired youth of similar age and the youngest child inside the cell, the three of them were helpless with swords held at their throats. Although Kaito was immortal, he feared that putting up reckless resistance here would endanger the other two, so he clicked his tongue and complied obediently.

Soon after, a doorway came into view at the end of the underground passage. On the two sides of the doorway were wooden doors illuminated by torches. These wooden doors were carved with depictions of spiders and crows. A great number of crows were flying overhead while spiders were weaving webs below, as though intending to devour those crows... Such was the tasteless scene depicted. Men opened the pair of doors and kicked Kaito and the others inside. The doors slammed shut as soon as they were kicked inside.

"Do your best."

(What kind of encouragement is that?)

Accompanying the ominous words of encouragement was the sound of a lock being closed.

Kaito turned around and was stunned.

Inside the room was a bizarre scene.

The ceiling was extremely tall, domed like a church's. The center of the ceiling was decorated with exquisite stained glass with floral patterns. However, the kaleidoscopic brightness was completely ruined by the multitude of barbed wire surrounding the ceiling like brambles. Furthermore, a great number of crows were sitting on top of the barbed wire, silently looking down at Kaito and the others.

(What the heck is that flock...? Damn it, I can't shake off this ominous feeling.)

Suppressing his disgust and uncertainty, Kaito shifted his gaze downward. The marble floor was violently chipped in several places. In addition to ditches, there were mounds of earth with tall trees planted on them.

There were small patches of woodland all over this room. What the heck was going on?

Suppressing the ominous feeling surging in his heart, Kaito turned his gaze to the center of the room that he had been trying his best to ignore.

On top of the round stage, an obese man in a tuxedo was snoring away. Suddenly, the man stood up and scratched his massive ass before turning to Kaito's group. On his face was a white crow mask.

"Mmmmmmmmmmm, weeeeeeeeeeeeelcome to your Grand Guignol!"

Filled with energy, his voice was cheerful, earsplitting, and rather hoarse. Kaito could feel himself breaking out in cold sweat all over. The man's cheerfulness, creepiness and repugnance were all making Kaito's instincts moan in fear, warning him.

*This man is a terrifying demon.*

Standing before Kaito was an opponent he could never handle on his own, yet of all places, he had to be right here.

"Hold on... I never heard anything about going on stage, Elisabeth."

"You people are simultaneously the audience, the playwrights and the actors. I hope you will enjoy yourselves fully. Scurry and flee here as much as you wish, for only the final survivor can be saved. *Reducing your numbers on your own* is totally fine tooooooooooooooo."

The man's voice grew even hoarser, his tone even more insane. Ending his speech sloppily, the man collapsed backwards. Before Kaito had a chance to analyze what his words meant, a crow took flight from the barbed wire.

Kaito could not help but widen his eyes. The crow flying down had a wingspan comparable to a grown man's height. The crow dove down at Kaito's group, the fierce wind from its wings forcing Kaito to close his eyes. At that very moment, he heard a scream from close by.

"No, doooooooooooooon't!"

A boy was abducted from right in front of Kaito's eyes. Using hooked talons to catch the boy, the crow flew up, approaching the side of the domed ceiling. A closer look revealed many spears embedded at that spot.

(What are those for?)

As soon as the question surfaced in Kaito's mind, the crow impaled the boy on a spear as though to answer him.

Just as how a shrike would impale their prey for later consumption, the boy was skewered in the abdomen, hanging on the ceiling, crying out hoarsely and feebly, arching his body violently like a shrimp. Soon after, he started spewing a great amount of bloody

froth from his mouth, convulsing mildly. However, his chest continued to heave up and down.

Confronted with such a horrific scene, Kaito was speechless.

Earlier, his attention had been drawn to the crows, which made him overlook the roof. But now, many children, too feeble to even scream, were hanging like specimens all around the ceiling. They were enduring endless suffering while still alive.

Cold sweat slid down Kaito's forehead. Given the situation at hand, regardless of his immortality, things would be over as soon as he was impaled on a spear like the rest of them.

Many crows took flight. Frozen in fear, the children stood motionless. Kaito yelled out loud:

As though freed from a binding curse, the children began to scatter and flee.

Kaito sensed strongly that this was a fresh new hell.

\* \* \*

Several children were gathered at the entrance to the underground passage, but the doors were locked.

"This isn't gonna work. Don't gather there. Hurry and run!"

Kaito yelled at the crying boy who was banging at the doors and started running with the other children. Someone bumped into Melanie, causing her to fall. In the confusion, Kaito grabbed her pale arm decisively.

"This way, Melanie."

"Lord Kaito."

"No, no, mommy, mommeeeeeeeeee!"

In front of Kaito, a crow had caught a demi-human girl by the shoulder. Kaito grabbed the girl's ankle while she was suspended in midair. The girl thrashed her arms wildly while her tears and snot dripped on the ground.

"No, no, no, no, oww, save me, don't let go, mommy, mommeeeeeeeeee!"

"Hang in there!"

Kaito gave the girl's ankles a vigorous tug to the side, causing a chunk of flesh to be gouged deeply from her shoulder, making her to scream sharply. However, the crow crashed into a nearby crow, loosening its grip as Kaito predicted.

"Guh."

Kaito managed to catch the falling demi-human girl and ran together with Melanie. Kaito's shoulder gradually grew wet and heavy from the girl's tears. Another few children were caught in their surroundings.

Black feathers drifted down while deafening screams were heard. Blood dripped down from the ceiling, staining the floor.

The children crying and screaming but no one came to save them. Amid this despair, everyone was a helpless victim for the crows to prey on. Feeling a burning sensation in his stomach, Kaito almost vomited before cursing in his thoughts.

"Screw this!"

Taking Melanie and the demi-human girl with him, Kaito barely made his way into a patch of woods. There were several clusters of trees in the great hall with thick foliage, enough to block the crows' view temporarily to enable them to escape.

These trees were apparently placed by the demon for the sake of prolonging the game. Despite his seething anger, Kaito had no choice but to feel thankful for this gimmick. Checking the shoulder wound of the crying demi-human girl, Kaito grabbed the hem of Melanie, who was sitting next to him, and tore it forcefully.

"Sorry, I need to use this!"

"L-Lord Kaito, why are you doing this?"

"Help me bandage this child's shoulder. Over here and that part too. Please!"

"Oh, I-I see. I shall help right away!"

Melanie clenched her fist and clumsily began to stop the girl's bleeding. At that moment, Kaito sneaked a peek at the crows from between gaps in the trees. The crows had yet to discover Kaito and

his companions, but many of them had caught a boy that was fleeing to the center, impaling him on a spear.

"Damn it."

Kaito could not help but turn away from the cruel scene, but then he noticed something strange. Between the trees were axes and swords wrapped in cute ribbons. Kaito naturally realized the intent and instantly felt all the blood in his body run cold.

The demon had said, "*Reducing your numbers on your own* is totally fine too."

In other words, he was asking them to kill one another here.

".....Fuck this... shit."

Kaito poured all the anger from his heart into these words. At the same time, he felt as though a switch had been pressed in his heart. Like the negative emotions he frequently experienced in his past life, the extreme anger, resentment and fear seemed to light a fuse, gradually enabling Kaito to regain his earlier calmness.

Staring straight at the weapons, Kaito decided there was no need to follow the organizer's intent obediently. Instead, he would use them as tools that might be able to break through despair.

He called out to Melanie.

"Could you listen to me, Melanie?"

Melanie turned around but for some reason, her gaze was fixated behind Kaito, eyes widened in surprise. Feeling a chill run down his spine, Kaito trusted his instinct and instantly lunged forward.

At the same time, there was a sound of slicing wind behind him.

"You're..."

"!"

Kaito turned around, only to see the red-haired youth standing there, the one around his age who had been threatened by a sword earlier together with him. The youth held up a large sword in both hands and was trembling. Kaito had no idea what this guy was doing and the situation was quite dangerous.

Kaito raised both arms to show he bore no ill will and slowly spoke to the youth.

"Calm down or you'll fall for the demon... the enemy's trickery. In this scary situation, can you really believe the enemy's words?"

"...Ooh, oooh."

"Even if you end up as the last person remaining, is there any guarantee you'll actually be saved? Instead of killing each other, why don't we find a way to escape and call for help?"

"Shut up! Who's gonna come save me!?"

The youth suddenly yelled emotionally and swung the sword hard. Kaito raised his arms again to appease him.

"Calm down. Just calm down. Take a deep breath first. Let's start from the beginning. Why do you think that?"

"H-How could anyone possibly come to save me!? Even my own mother left me to die! She left me to die for the sake of others in the

family! How could anyone come to save me, who would come to save me!? If that's the case... if that's the case, I've no choice but to do this!"

"I get it... So your fragile little mind couldn't take it."

The youth's face was twisted, almost about to cry. Kaito felt compelled to agree with what he had said.

Humans were willing to do anything, whatever it took, if they firmly believed that it was the only path to survival. But unfortunately, things were probably not going to end well. In his previous life, Kaito had given up on thinking and kept helping *that guy* with his dirty work, but still ended up strangled to death by him. However, this youth probably would not listen even if Kaito were to share his personal experience here.

While slowly edging towards the weapons he had just discovered, Kaito tried his best to keep the conversation going.

"That's why you have to kill me? Do you think you can kill me easily?"

"Shut up! You're wearing nice clothes, I'm sure you must've lived a privileged and easy life! In that case, the least you could do is die for me in the end!"

"Like hell there'd be anyone stupid enough to die for sympathy! And if life had been so easy for me, I wouldn't be in this situation now!"

Just a little more and a weapon would be within reach. However, the youth seemed too close. His expression was violently distorted

as he vigorously raised his sword over his head. Just as Kaito was thinking this was a crisis, he heard the sound of flapping wings.

Cawwww!

A crow had spotted them from the air and flown down. Screaming strangely, the youth swung his sword randomly in a frenzy. Prepared to be injured, Kaito took this opportunity to grab an ax. After looking back and forth between the crow and Kaito, the youth screamed in despair. The crow flew at the youth whereas Kaito raised his ax.

Thud, Kaito smashed the crow's head heavily.

The crow fell to the ground and Kaito swung the ax down on its head several times. Since the enemy was no ordinary crow, failure to kill it thoroughly could prove fatal.

Kaito completely chopped up even the crow's organs, only stopping when he was certain of death. After finishing his job, Kaito turned to the youth who had collapsed limply. Raising the bloody ax, Kaito said:

"That's how you should use a weapon."

The youth's face began to twitch, tears rolling out of his eyes. Seeing that, Kaito realized the youth was afraid of him. Shaking his head while in a hazy dream-like state, he lowered his ax.

"Uh, basically, you can break a locked door just by using an ax. The underground passage is narrow, so it shouldn't be that easy for the crows to chase us there. There's a chance of surviving once we escape into the passage. Although the weapons were left here for us to kill one another, we've got to let the enemy know that they made huge mistake in doing that."

"...I-I..."

"How much longer are you gonna just tremble there? I'm not mad at you. Hurry and stand up."

No matter what, Kaito had already been killed once. He could afford to be lenient towards attempted murder.

He waved his hand, gesturing for the youth to come over. This light-hearted action finally made the red-haired youth stop trembling. Timidly, he reached out and held Kaito's palm tightly.

Thus, Kaito and his party began their counterattack and escape.

\* \* \*

A crow caught the arm of a young beast folk hiding in the forest and spread its wings.

Secretly approaching from behind, Kaito jumped out and severed those black wings in one chop.

The crow fell silently to the ground and the red-haired youth stabbed the crow's body repeatedly with his sword. Melanie gently

hugged the crying beast folk kid. Wiping away sweat that had slid to his chin, Kaito turned around.

"So this is everyone, right?"

They had been moving between the trees and managed to gather eight children. Were there so few survivors? Kaito was quite surprised, but there was no time to be shocked right now.

Since they had been hiding in the trees and aiming for instant kills on every strike, the crows had not yet realized something was wrong. Crows that had finished their hunting duties were resting on the barbed wire. If Kaito and company were to escape, now was probably the only chance.

Kaito pulled out a new ax and dagger from under a tree, handed the more easily handled dagger to the beast folk kid, then crouched down. Looking into each and everyone's eyes, he then patiently told them what the plan was next.

"Listen carefully, we're going to make a dash for the entrance to the underground passage. If the crows come at us, swing your weapons wildly like we agreed. No need to kill the crows, just protect yourself. Keep yourself alive, whatever it takes. We're moving out!"

Leading the children, Kaito rushed out. It was open ground in front of them, lacking in cover, the floor looked as though it stretched endlessly. Running desperately as hard as they could, they finally reached the entrance.

Kaito turned around. During this time, the crows were already closing in from behind. Swinging his ax, Kaito attacked the door.

"Spread out close by as we agreed earlier!"

At the red-haired youth's command, the children fanned out, brandishing their weapons. However, this was probably not going to buy a great deal of time. Ignoring the impact and intense pain hurting his shoulder, he swiftly attacked the part of the door surrounding the handle. Chopping off and pushing the lock away, Kaito kicked the door open amid the crazy screaming.

"The door's open, hurry—"

At the same time, he heard a scream from behind. Kaito turned around to see that a boy wielding a scimitar had his eye pecked out by a giant beak and the weapon dropped from his hand. His little head also fell on the ground like a fruit, bouncing once. Death was instantaneous, presumably.

Enraged by what was happening before him, Kaito saw red and sprang into action. Unconcerned with the tearing of arm muscles, he raised his ax and threw it with all his might. The crow that had killed the boy and was about to chase other children was bifurcated by the flying ax. Other crows got caught in this attack and fell one after another. Kaito yelled as loud as he could:

"Run away now!"

With Kaito's vigorous roar as a signal, the children rushed to the door. The red-haired youth followed at the back.

Picking up the scimitar that had fallen from the dead boy's hand, Kaito chopped off the head of nearby crow while he was at it, and

strenuously tossed the corpse towards the flock. Dodging the corpse, the crows flew up. Seizing this opening, Kaito rushed through the doorway and grabbed a torch next to the door then tossed at a dead crow's body. The fire began to spread, which ought to buy them some amount of time.

While the crows were flapping their wings to fan away the smoke they hated, Kaito rushed back to the door. Melanie and the children had set off already, but for some reason, the red-haired youth was waiting for Kaito. Blinking, Kaito yelled:

"Hey, what are you waiting for? Hurry and run!"

"Uh, oh..."

The red-haired youth and Kaito began to run together. The noise of crows gradually faded behind them. The fire seemed to serve as an effective barrier. Kaito sincerely hoped the crows would not chase after them.

Inside the dim passage, only the footsteps of Kaito and his companion echoed. Hesitating, the youth spoke up:

"I-I'm Neue. What's your name, mister?"

"I'm Kaito. Sena Kaito."

"Sena Kaito... Sorry, Kaito."

"What's this about?"

"I tried to kill you just now and even said you had a privileged and easy life."

"Forget about that. People say all kinds of crazy things in sudden situations like this."

"But you were much calmer than us and even killed crows to save us. You're amazing, so amazing. Why can you be so brave—"

Neue stopped mid-sentence. Kaito and he turned to look behind them in surprise. Kaito could sense a terrifying presence swelling up. Accompanied by a rustling sound that was difficult to describe, something black was restless.

The columns of bug eyes shone. Eight stout legs were dragging along the stone walls.

Behind Kaito and Neue was a giant spider.

On further examination, Kaito saw that this abomination was covered by several crow's worth of feathers and even had a sharp beak. Kaito realized why the crows had not pursued them.

Thinking that the fire had succeeded in buying time, what a naive notion.

Knowing that their original forms were at a disadvantage in the underground passage, the crows had merged together to become a spider.

The spider discharged silk and Kaito immediately defended using the scimitar. In the next instant, he pulled the scimitar back for a wind up then threw it. The blade struck the spider but did not

embed itself into the spider's body. Instead, it bounced off the thick crow feathers and slid to the ground. The spider cried out impatiently and discharged silk again. This time, the target was Neue, whose face was twisted in fear. Seeing his expression, Kaito felt as though he were looking at his own past self.

This young man had been cursed by his parent to go and die, then abandoned in this god forsaken place where no help was to be found.

Man, no helping it... Resigning himself, Kaito braced himself and extended his left arm.

Spider's silk wrapped around Kaito's arm. Kaito immediately snatched Neue's sword to chop the silk. The spider's silk felt almost like steel. Decisively, Kaito gave up on severing the silk and chopped his own arm off instead. The spider dragged its silk back and made a dissatisfied noise while eating Kaito's flesh with motions that were completely not bug-like.

Intense pain pierced Kaito's brain like a flash of lightning, but Kaito had some resistance towards pain and his body was immortal too, so the agony of an amputated arm was not unbearable. If he failed to endure it, he was going to die here.

Kaito returned the sword to Neue, gripped his arm stump tightly and continued to run. Running by his side, Neue cried.

"Why, why why why, why did you do that!? Why!?"

"Don't worry. I've already died."

"What the heck? Are you retarded?"

"That's no way to talk. In truth, I'm not from this world."

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't ask. Listen to me first. In another world, my father used me to the limit and in the end, he killed me like throwing away garbage. My life was like a piece of shit. I originally thought things were over, but... I guess you'd call her a mage? Anyway, she summoned me to this world and forced me into this fake body."

Kaito felt compelled to tell his story and continued. After eating Kaito's arm, bone and all, the spider released silk again. This time, Neue blocked the silk with his sword but the sword was dragged away. Just as Neue's expression froze, Kaito sighed deeply and resigned himself. He actually preferred if he did not have to do this, but there was no other option. He held his breath and told Neue:

"Since I'm dead anyway, next time the spider shots silk, let it eat me. Take that chance to escape."

"What rubbish are you saying again? You must be retarded!"

"I'm not retarded. If I get eaten completely, I'd probably die, but I never wanted to come back to life in the first place, so ending things here isn't that bad. In contrast, you shouldn't die yet, but should live on, right?"

Kaito looked at Neue's still child-like face. Neue stared back at Kaito. Tears welled up in Neue's eyes.

(Yeah, as expected. I knew it.)

Kaito nodded.

A child crying in fear should not be staying in this kind of place.

Right now, Kaito already had no tears to shed.

"You can't die yet. You must do everything you can to live. Do your best."

Kaito spoke to Neue rather cheerfully. At that moment, the spider emitted a weird sound. He bit his lip hard.

Confronting death again was still very scary. His forgotten fear resurfaced. Eaten alive, how terrifying was that going to be? Even so, there was no other way. Kaito exhaled softly.

In order to save someone who resembled his past self, he made up his mind to die.

He wanted to be what his past self once wished for... A hero to come to the rescue.

When his thoughts reached this point, Kaito felt that this was not a bad way to put an end to this injuring time extension to his boring life. Just as Kaito came to terms in his mind, the spider discharged silk. Without hesitation, he stopped running but at that moment —

"— — Huh?"

Neue shoved him away heavily.

Neue's skinny back became stuck to the spider silk. Lying sprawled on the ground, Kaito watched the scene before him in surprise. He reached out for Neue while asking the stupid question that suddenly surfaced in his mind.

"W-Why?"

"Why, I wonder?"

Probably Neue himself did not know either. His voice was confused. The spider retracted its silk.

At that moment, with a convulsive expression, Neue muttered:

"Ah, I'm probably hoping... You could find happiness in this world, I guess."

Neue cursed "damn it" softly and was gradually dragged away with a smile that was almost about to burst into tears. Then came a terrifying scream.

Kaito stood up, only to see the spider eating something, totally absorbed in its meal. When Kaito realized the nature of the sound, rage and hatred instantly consumed his mind, which ended up restoring his calmness. Kaito suddenly stopped and murmured indifferently in a cold tone of voice, the irrevocable truth.

"Yeah..... Dead people cannot be saved."

In the next instant, Kaito turned around and sprinted. Even he himself was surprised by his current calm state. His face was expressionless but the unquellable anger was gradually surfacing before his eyes. Like moaning, he repeatedly muttered "kill-it-kill-it-kill-it-have-to-kill-it, have-to-have-to-have-to-have-to-have-to-kill-it."

Kaito expressed his killing intent and fled as fast as he could. If he were to be caught here, Neue's sacrifice would have been in vain. He must not let Neue's death be worthless like a dog's. With such conviction in his heart, Kaito ran like the wind.

Soon after, a door came into view. The secret entrance was probably locked too, but he had asked one of the bigger kids to take the ax in advance. Now that so much time had been bought, they must have managed to break through the door, right? However, Kaito narrowed his eyes. There was not even a scratch on the door. Could it be that it was not locked?

Just as he was wondering, the door opened. The first to appear was a red dress resembling a poppy. Then Melanie emerged from the door. Speaking in an endearing voice, she ran over to Kaito's side right away.

"Lord Kaito!"

"Melanie? Why are you running back to this side!? Hurry and escape!"

Ignoring his warning, Melanie hugged him tightly. Her soft arms wrapped themselves around the back of his neck, bringing her cherry lips close to his ear. Accompanied by her sweet breath, Melanie whispered something.

In that instant, the door opened again. Kaito felt a vivid color imprinted onto his retinas.

Even redder than Melanie's dress, yet undoubtedly pure white originally, a dress fluttered.

"Oh, Kaito!"

A nonchalant shout, making Kaito wonder if he was in the wrong place.

All covered in blood, Elisabeth was waving energetically to Kaito.

\* \* \*

"Oh my, I was just about to head over, so this saves me quite some trouble. To think you came over on your own, now aren't you quite a smart lad? Hmm? What are you all covered in blood? By the way, aren't you on the verge of dying from blood loss? Where did your arm fall off? Don't tell me it is detachable? In any case, tie it up with a chain first... Eh, a bug? Uwah! Isn't this a bug!? I hate bugs! Seeing spiders makes me mad!"

Looking behind Kaito, Elisabeth jumped in surprise. The instant she landed, a swirl of darkness and red petals flew up, rushing at the

ceiling. Immediately a large hole opened up over the spider with a gigantic weight featuring countless barbs.

The terrifying weight fell down, crushing the bug.

"Death by squashing!"

Elisabeth raised a fist to the sky. This joke of an attack did not seem like a joke at all.

That terrifying spider was now completely crushed like a cockroach flattened under a slipper. The bleeding from his arm was stopped through the extremely violent measure of tying it up with a chain. The pain was making his mouth gape open. Melanie was gripping Kaito's shirt, looking like she feared Elisabeth.

Under this heavy silence, Elisabeth cocked her head slightly, completely failing to read the mood.

"So, what exactly happened?"

At that moment, something broke inside Kaito's mind. Elisabeth's overwhelming strength as well as that carefree expression that Kaito found nostalgic, his nerves, tensed to their limit, instantly relaxed.

Frantically, he told Elisabeth about the situation.

"E-Elisabeth, a demon has appeared over in the secondary building. It said something like 'welcome to your Grand Guignol! You people

are simultaneously the audience, the playwrights and the actors. I hope you will enjoy yourselves fully.' Then the crows..."

"Oh, I understand. I see now. Hmm, oh? Heh."

In a state of confusion, Kaito narrated nonstop in a flood of words, even exhausting every inconsequential detail. Elisabeth clasped her hands together behind her head and walked through the door then into the hall directly to advance through the passage on the right. Then without stopping, she entered a staff passage.

Hugging the trembling Melanie's shoulders, Kaito followed after Elisabeth.

"Are you listening, Elisabeth? There's a demon there."

"Kaito! Look!"

She halted her footsteps in front of an ajar door. Kaito leaned forward and peered inside, only to see a kitchen.

A noble girl was on the cutting board, her beautiful dress tragically splattered with blood. Her rib area had been gouged away. Next to the dead girl was a man with a bull's face, dressed in a cook's coat, whose thighs had been severed by a saw. This was apparently a devotee in the guise of a cook, probably killed by Elisabeth.

"As testified by the Meat Supplier, part of the dead girl's body has been removed. This is because nobles tend to have purer bloodlines than commoners, so *they also taste better*. Nobles are eaten while the commoners are used for entertainment. It looks like their original plan was to have fun with you and the commoner girls at the secondary building before enjoying a meal at the main house. Oh dear, what extravagance."

Elisabeth nodded, "yes, yes." Kaito clenched his fist, once again confirming the anger and killing intent in his heart. Not understanding Kaito's tumultuous emotions, Elisabeth turned to him and shrugged.

"Although it would be quite entertaining to round up those fools who tried to make food out of you, then force them to spit out what they knew about the secret passages before killing them, there are too many of them and they have fled to the courtyard, so taking care of them will be quite a hassle."

"Elisabeth, I fully understand why it took you so long to arrive. However, none of this matters at all. What we need to do now is head over to the secondary building to kill that demon."

"Hmph, quite a rare sight to see you so motivated. Look at your arm, a human unafraid of pain is very uncommon indeed... However, Kaito, how were you able to muster the determination to forsake your arm, overcoming adverse tribulations, only to remain oblivious of the truth before your eyes?"

"What do you mean?"

While they were talking, Elisabeth continued to advance. She left the kitchen, reached the corridor, then stopped in the middle of the hall. In addition to the devotees, the rest of the demon's subordinates might have all fled too. The main house was completely silent.

Under the beautiful and luxurious chandelier, Elisabeth turned around, her black hair fluttering.

"More than just gaining strength, what this demon genuinely seeks is to make playthings out of humans. This desire for entertainment

surpasses The Knight's and matches my own tastes. Human suffering is delight while human screaming is joy. However, this demon prefers entertainment that takes effort to set up and Grand Guignol would serve as an excellent example. Now think about this. What exactly is the strongest and deepest despair that someone with such a twisted and aberrant personality would desire and painstakingly create?"

In the beginning, Kaito had no clue what Elisabeth was talking about but he then flashed back to the memory of his father strangling him. Given water just as he was developing signs of dehydration, for an instant, Kaito thought he was going to be saved, but unfortunately, the delusion went by in flash and he was killed.

The strongest despair was when the light of salvation was snatched away and utterly extinguished just when you think you had found it.

"....Offering hope, making the other side think they could be saved, then pushing them down the abyss."

"Precisely! When the participants are down to two, to let one person think that all he needed to do was kill this weak girl to become *the last survivor*, then killing him brutally just as he was convinced he was saved... Now that is undoubtedly the most entertaining way to do things! However, things have deviated greatly from this plan thanks to you, but for that demon, the variation probably provides a different sort of fun. In any case, not a single child managed to escape to this place."

Reading between the lines to catch Elisabeth's hint, Kaito closed his eyes. The hall was silent. He could not hear sounds of children at

all. Kaito shook his head and backed a few steps away from the lone survivor, Melanie.

The children who had escaped from the game of death, which wretched beast's jaws had they disappeared into...?

"So there you have it. I suspect that the demon is loathe to stay in the feeble form a moment longer."

With a smile of tender affection, Elisabeth scrutinized Melanie's face. Then with a disdainful tone, Elisabeth asked Melanie, who was trembling nonstop.

"As the daughter of an *earl*, why were you chosen to participate in the game instead of being used for food?"

Instantly, the poppy-like dress began to swell like tumor. The lovely girl's form was transformed into a bundle of cloth that had been stuffed with meat inside. Her skin ruptured with pus overflowing from within.

Inside was a naked man with unusually pale skin all covered with crow feathers and even sporting spider legs.

The ugly, fat and bald man opened his crow's beak and made weird noises. Staring at the massive man with the bizarre appearance, Elisabeth clicked her tongue at the spider legs and touched her chin while saying:

"The man on the other side is probably a devotee or a fake. After losing human form, taking on a young girl's guise is quite easy, I suppose... Nay, judging from the fact that he takes boys as sacrifices too, perhaps cross-dressing is just a hobby. Hmm, how repulsive. And despite his human identity as a marquess, to think that the demon he merged with was just The Earl. Getting my hopes up, only for me to find that there is only small fry waiting for me, what an outrage!"

"Who cares about that stuff? Just hurry and kill this guy."

"What is the matter? You have been acting unlike yourself since just now, you know? Do you bear a grudge against him by any chance?"

"That's right. I'm willing to do anything in my power. So please, kill this guy cruelly for me."

Kaito repeated himself with emphasis. The intense desire for bloodshed was creating a powerful vortex in his chest.

To think that he was the sole survivor. The Earl had slaughtered all the children. This made Kaito feel completely ridiculous. How could such a bastard be allowed to live? So long as this Earl before him could be killed, Kaito did not care even if he lost his own life, hard enough as it was to save.

"—Hah."

Elisabeth scoffed instead of answering. In the next instant, she floored Kaito with a kick and stepped on his back. Exerting pressure that could very well break Kaito's spine, she placed her entire weight on him.

"Gah!"

"Ordering your own master is not allowed, you useless dog. I do not need you to tell me, of course this thing is my prey. Even if you did not beg me, I would enjoy this prey to my heart's content."

Elisabeth declared coldly and gave Kaito a vigorous kick, almost rupturing his belly. Kaito was sent flying to a corner by the wall, coughing up bloody vomit all over the ground. Next, Elisabeth turned to The Earl again.

"I apologize for my servant's rudeness. Now, all hindrances are gone."

She spread her arms majestically, conjuring a dance of darkness and red flowers that enveloped her body.

After the darkness dissipated and the petals fell to the ground, Elisabeth was dressed in her usual bondage outfit of black. Held in her delicate hand was the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstein.

Elisabeth placed her hand on her exposed chest and curtsied towards The Earl.

"Welcome to my Grand Guignol! I am simultaneously the audience, the playwright and the actor. I have no plans to enjoy this, so all you need to do is scream like a pig and writhe like a caterpillar and that would be fine."

Elisabeth declared loudly then swung down her sword sharply. Chains extended out of thin air, sweeping at The Earl's location. Using eight spider legs, The Earl easily deflected the chains then

jumped back, breaking the chandelier. Mustering strength in his unusually pale body, The Earl shot out countless crow feathers from his skin. At the same time, he spat out spider's silk from his mouth, sending innumerable attacks at Elisabeth.

"Ha, too naive!"

Elisabeth rapidly dashed left and right, evading every attack. The floor and ceiling became riddled with holes but Elisabeth remained unscathed. Even so, it looked like Elisabeth was too occupied to counterattack. Seeing that the chains stopped attacking, The Earl laughed malevolently and continued his violent wave of attacks.

However, he failed to notice the darkness and red petals swirling overhead and underfoot.

Suddenly, the ceiling and the floor came together, clamping him violently.

More precisely, he was sandwiched between two massive slabs of stone that had flown out of the ceiling and the floor.

The Earl was clamped between two massive round slabs of stone. There was a golden rod embedded in the center of the stone, resembling the crank of a street organ.

By the time Kaito noticed, Elisabeth had already sat down on the handle portion of the rod. She smiled at The Earl who was blinking in confusion.

*"The Feel of Death.* I used it just now on your familiar, crushing it to death, well then—You shall proceed to be ground into minced meat bit by bit."

With an ominous sound, the round stones began to turn. Every time the crank went up and down once, the two stones would rotate like wheels. One turned clockwise while the other turned counterclockwise. Caught in the middle, The Earl's body made unpleasant wet noises while gradually grinding away. As the stones turned, the crow feathers were plucked off, the bloated pale flesh was ground into minced scrap. Mixed with flesh and fat, blood gradually dripped to the floor.

The Earl emitted a terrifying scream as his beak fell off. The human lips originally hidden beneath were trembling nonstop in pain and terror. His ears were ripped off while the opposite sides of his head were getting scraped in clockwise and counterclockwise directions, screaming madly in this fate worse than death.

"EE-Elisabeth, Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

"What is the matter, Earl? Your voice is an affront to the ears just like a pig's squeal. Could you not show a little dignity and caw like a crow?"

"H-How about a deeeeeeeeeeeeeal with me?"

"Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmm?"

The wheels suddenly stopped. With a vicious look in his eyes, Kaito muttered:

"...Like anyone would accept a deal from you."

"F-From what I have heard, Torturchen will face death by fire after hunting the thirteen demons. You will not need to die if you do not kill me. Am I right? Our interests are aligned, right? L-Let me go."

The Earl's face was compressed from the left and the right, spitting out blood and spit from this lips that had been squeezed into a vertical form. Elisabeth suddenly murmured then jumped lightly off the handle. She smiled at the ugly man that was stuck between the wheels. Trembling in fear, The Earl smiled disgracefully at her in return.

"You imbecile!"

With a great shout, the wheels started to turn again. Giving off strange sobbing noises, The Earl thrashed his arms and legs randomly. However, his arms were ground away and even his shoulders were scraped flat. Like a fruit, The Earl was gradually pressed and juiced. Progressively increasing in viscosity, his blood was spreading filthily across the floor.

With cold light akin to absolute zero in her eyes, Elisabeth glared at The Earl and said:

"Oppressive rulers need to be killed, tyrants need to be hanged, genociders need to be slaughtered brutally. This is natural law."

What awaits at the endpoint of the path of torture is hell without a shred of redemption, adorned by one's own screams. Only then does the torturer's life come to a conclusion. Are you inflicting torture without even understanding such principles? Stop making me laugh, Earl."

Elisabeth was currently in a rage, expressing unprecedeted anger. Finally, with a thunderous crash, the two wheels slammed together. Viscous blood flowed out from gap between the stones. Elisabeth mercilessly stepped on the wheel crushing The Earl to death and murmured softly:

"Whether you or I—Both of us are to be forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth, to ultimately die."

At the same time, the pool of blood turned into black feathers, flying up to stop in the air for a moment before falling down slowly.

In this serene and beautiful scene akin to the falling of black snow, Kaito clenched his fist.

"...Hey, what about those children, impaled alive on spears at the secondary building..."

"Their lives were merely sustained magically by The Earl's powers. As soon as The Earl dies, they will presumably perish too."

"...I see."

"Nothing to get depressed about. This is much better than living in endless pain and suffering."

Elisabeth scoffed with disinterest. Kaito stared blankly at her. He used to think that Elisabeth's ways were no different from the demons, but now he got the sense that she and the demons were not alike fundamentally. At least, Kaito could see two major differences.

Enduring his body's pain, Kaito forced himself to get up while speaking to her:

"Thank you, Elisabeth."

"Why words of gratitude? I am simply entertaining myself. Furthermore, your gratitude is not only hilarious but also filled with misunderstanding."

"After you kill those thirteen demons, you have to die too, right? Yet you still helped me to kill this guy."

"That is neither here nor there. I did not do this for you at all. The thirteen demons are simply the last thirteen individuals that the Church has permitted me to torture. The thought of extorting them to save my own life never crossed my mind. Since I was captured after sacrificing a great number of the populace and sentenced to death, it is my duty to be burned to death."

Elisabeth walked out, her heels clicking sharply, the black hem of her skirt fluttering.

"Cruel and proud, I extol life like a wolf, and will ultimately die like a sow."

Saying that on her own, Elisabeth gradually walked away. In a very tiny voice, she murmured at the end:

"—This is preordained."

Left behind, Kaito stared blankly into the air. Black feather brushed past his cheek as though in mourning.

He recalled Neue and thought about the dead children. In the end, he was the only survivor... Did this escape drama end with such a ludicrous outcome? However, no matter how much he regretted, harsh reality was neither going to change nor was it possible to change.

Since he had survived, there was one thing he was obliged to do.

He recalled Neue's last words and muttered quietly:

"I don't think I'll be able to find happiness in this world, will I?"

*I guess I'll try struggling as much as I can and see.*

Next, Kaito grabbed his lost wrist and began to run. At the same time, a black feather fluttering in the air burned intensely with blue flames. After that, the countless flying feathers all went ablaze, gradually setting the room on fire.

Finally, the blue flames started burning the entire castle.

As though mourning the numerous dead, the tongues of flame silently licked the stone walls.

# 3

## 宝物庫の探索



## Chapter 3 - Exploring the Treasure Vault

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The dish of "wild deer liver saute paired with marinated raisins" flew up violently into the air.

Kaito raised a silver platter over his head to block the rain of food before shifting the platter in front of him in a splendid defense against the flying table knife aimed at him. Clang, the table knife bounced away out of sight.

"Like~ I~ said~, stop throwing things."

This kind of scene had repeated for the past ten-odd days and Kaito was already used to it.

He was starting to worry that he was too adaptable.

Putting that aside, after defending against all the attacks, Kaito turned his gaze to the perpetrator—Elisabeth.

With one foot on the table, Elisabeth was pressing a shaking index finger against her forehead. Next to her, a bottle of wine which had been selected very rigorously had already been knocked over. With tears in her eyes, Elisabeth cried out loudly:

"So disgusting! Even though the sweet and sour flavor of the marinated raisins is so weak, it forms an inseparable tangle with the liver's explosion of bloody stench. You must be a genius at this sort of thing!"

"I'm not worthy of your praise."

"I am not praising you!"

The fork flew. This time's attack was quite skillful. Passing merely millimeters above the platter, the fork stabbed into Kaito's forehead. Kaito pulled out the fork and blood came out with a spurting sound effect.

"Miss Elisabeth, Miss Elisabeth, I am bleeding."

"Who cares about you!? Overcome this level of injury with spirit! As my servant, you can do it."

"No... Using spirit is really..."

Pressing on his wound, Kaito sighed. Actually, this sort of minor injury was no shock to him at all. For starters, pain and suffering had never been absent from Kaito's life. Not too long ago, he had lost an arm, so this kind of minor wound was trivial in comparison.

Humans were truly creatures that adapted to their environment.

Even so, Kaito's cooking ability was still at a despairing level.

Kaito himself had almost no standards when it came to food, hence he could not understand Elisabeth's overwhelming rage at all. He was in complete despair over his cooking ability, even to the point of thinking that trying to improve would be pointless. However, Elisabeth seemed to be harboring substantial expectations for him and her disappointment was growing with each passing day.

"I shall no longer expect anything at all from your cooking. You do not need to prepare dinner tonight."

After finishing the salt-roasted heart Kaito had prepared, Elisabeth made her way to the throne room and finally issued that announcement. Behind her was the tragic hole in the wall, exposing the clear blue sky.

The wall broken by The Knight's beast from before had remained in its collapsed state with no one tending to it. Even so, Elisabeth seemed to have a preference for this room, continuing to use it despite its sorry state.

Sitting on her throne that had been moved back to its proper place, she showed a vexed expression and issued a command to Kaito, who was waiting on the side, one that differed from her usual commands.

"Instead, I order you to explore the *treasure vault* today."

"The treasure vault?"

Kaito repeated her words like a parrot. Elisabeth tapped the stone tiled floor with the tip of her foot. Pitch-black darkness and red petals began to burn like a torch in the center of the floor then contracted into a point, scorching a square area of the stone floor before disappearing, leaving a black door.

As though equipped with a spring mechanism, the door opened suddenly from inside.

In it was a spiral staircase. Judging from the castle's layout, it was quite abnormal for there to be stairs under the throne room. However, since he had already witnessed a door appearing out of thin air before, it would be quite boorish to voice such a comment. Hence, Kaito simply felt honestly impressed at a time like this.

"So there was a place like this here?"

"Hmph, after that incident with The Earl, a thought came to me. Your cooking is even worse than pig feed, but your pudding was delicious, you were able to make decisive calls of judgment, and you faced me fearlessly. These aspects are rather excellent. Every time you hang out the linen, that look of disdain on your face is rather displeasing. Hence, I have decided to bestow you with a weapon allowing you to face a demon on your own. Pick any item you wish from the *treasure vault*. Feel free to choose anything you are able to use. No matter what you find, I will give it to you."

"Uh, I guess I should be saying 'I'm so honored'?"

"By the way, allow me to give an introduction. Despite its name of 'treasure vault,' it is actually a magical dimension I created to transfer all my possessions from the castle at my homeland. Everything inside is covered with grudges and memories, so careless touching could be fatal, understood?"

"Sure enough, you're just picking a fight after all, right!?"

"Silence! Cut the endless chit chat! Off you go!"

Elisabeth's skillful and accurate kick sent Kaito flying like a ball, rolling through the door in an exaggerated manner as one would see in a cartoon. Then with perfect timing, the door slammed shut. Kaito tried pushing and pulling but to no avail.

With no way to go back, Kaito sighed at Elisabeth's merciless ways.

In front of him was a long spiral staircase, the only path at the moment.

In the darkness, the rectangular steps of stone curved gently, hovering in midair at regular intervals. Looking down, all Kaito could see were steps stretching endlessly and nothing else. Warm wind could be felt blowing upward from below the steps though there was no guarantee that there was solid ground at the end of the staircase.

"...What the heck."

Looking at these stone steps which did not even have a handrail, Kaito could not help but grumble. Despair seeped into his heart bit by bit but he shook his head and changed his mindset.

(Elisabeth made a good point.)

A weapon was necessary in order to fight demons. There was no telling whether he would end up in a similar situation as last time again. If he had obtained a weapon, perhaps he could have fought the crows and the spider. Doing this was to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

For the sake of preventing that from happening again.

So what if he had to explore this ominous magical dimension?

"So that's that. I just have to brace myself and do it."

Confronted with the steps that seemed to lead to the bottom of hell, Kaito committed his resolve. Spreading his arms to maintain balance, he began the downward journey with the sound of solid footsteps.

\* \* \*

Kaito thought the surroundings consisted only of eternal darkness, but unexpectedly, this was not so.

As he descended, a great variety of shapes and forms started appearing next to the steps. Amid the darkness, there were gigantic birdcages, iron maidens, gallows, Spanish donkeys, appearing one after another haphazardly. Glinting with dark luster, those instruments of torture all showed signs of use. The iron maiden's chest was caked with dried blood, the protruding spikes inside the birdcage had discolored pieces of flesh and fat on them.

Looking at these rusted instruments, Kaito realized something. Unlike the magical items summoned by Elisabeth, these were *real articles*. The magical items summoned by Elisabeth were brand new. Most likely, she possessed the power to endlessly summon instruments of torture and execution free from rust or fat sticking on their surface.

However, why were these unusual tools kept here?

"...Intriguing."

Puzzled, Kaito continued onward.

By the time he realized, the steps were gone, turning to a flat path. Perhaps his sense of balance was disrupted in this dimension. He had no idea when the change started. He had been following the endless stone steps, advancing onward. Meanwhile, the surrounding objects became even more varied.

Gemstones the size of a human fist, a pot decorated with three-dimensional bees around it, ancient rum glasses... Tiger pelts, ivory, broken chandeliers, small mummies of some sort, bronze axes, iron swords, silver spears... Kaito pulled out a magnificent sword from between two pots then could not help but stagger backwards.

"No good, too heavy... The axes and spears are too heavy too."

The weapons at The Earl's house had apparently been chosen so that even children could wield them easily. On the other hand, the weapons in the "treasure vault" were meant for career fighters such as knights or swordsmen. Kaito's body had not been strengthened magically nor had he undergone training, so it looked like he had no way of using these weapons effectively.

He tossed the sword aside, only to hear a heavy clang as though it was being swallowed by a pile of gold coins like sinking into quicksand.

Completely uninterested in wealth and treasure, he continued to walk, but the farther he went, the less the randomly scattered objects resembled weapons.

A chair that looked very comfortable to sit on. A half-finished work of embroidery. A painting depicting a deep forest scene.

"...Hmm?"

Suddenly, the tip of Kaito's shoe bumped into something soft. He looked down to see a small teddy bear with cotton spilling out from its belly. By the time he realized, he was surrounded completely by children's toys.

It looked like had he reached a level where Elisabeth's childhood possessions were kept.

The plushies were disemboweled, the dolls were decapitated. Porcelain, cotton, wood... Dolls and plushies of various materials exhibited twisted cross-sections that pained the viewer just by looking at them. This was sufficient evidence to know that these were her belongings.

"So she already had that kind of hobby back when she was little, huh?"

Kaito muttered in a daze. As the saying went, "The child is the father of the man." Elisabeth was definitely not cute as a person. Feeling surprised, Kaito was just about to toss the teddy bear away when he felt sorry for it and repositioned it properly.

Just as he was about to keep walking when he heard a hollow voice from afar.

"Elisabe... th... Eli... th... sabe... th..."

"What's going on?"

Kaito could not help but halt. Instantly, a man's deep voice ensnared him like a giant python.

"Elisabeth... Elisabeth... My lovely daughter... Elisabeth... My..."

The voice was terrifying, as intangible as wind blowing between trees, yet carrying warmth that clung to one's skin tightly. If one were to listen for long durations, the voice would probably permeate one's eardrums to eat away at the brain.

"What the... heck is this?"

Driven by an intense instinctual disgust, Kaito backed away. The voice grew progressively stronger as though pursuing him relentlessly. Hoping to lose that voice, Kaito ran subconsciously. However, the voice sounded quite obsessed, chasing him nonstop as though muttering "don't think you can escape."

"Elisabeth... Elisabeth... My lovely daughter... Elisabeth..."

"What the fuck is this!?"

No matter how he ran, Kaito still could not escape the voice. Looking around him for a way out, Kaito then noticed something. There was a door buried in a pile of toys that resembled a mountain of corpses. It seemed as though toy soldiers were guarding it. In desperation, Kaito grabbed the handle and pulled the door open.

Inside the open doorway was not a scene behind a door. Instead, it was a swathe of even sinister darkness without light. He took a few

steps through the door then immediately widened his eyes in surprise.

This moment, he was standing in an unfamiliar room.

".....Huh?"

Kaito surveyed his surroundings blankly. This was apparently a child's bedroom.

Within the cube-like layout of the room, the walls were covered by faded and yellowed wallpaper with patterns of flowers, the windowsill was decorated with adorable plaster in the shape of candies. The furniture was uniformly white. The dresser's golden handles were quite beautiful. On top of it were dolls and plushies. Surrounded by four posts, the bed was covered by pearly sheets that probably had a thick mattress stuffed with down underneath.

In a sea of blankets, multiple layers thick, sat a girl in a negligee.

The girl's chest was dyed red from blood.

Her face was pallid and her body was so skinny that one could see every vein clearly. Probably quite beautiful originally, her long black hair had lost its luster, getting messier the closer to the tips. Those large round eyes and straight nose were so beautiful that they

did not seem to belong to the mortal realm, however, those hollow eyes had lost all vitality. Her little thin lips had tragic traces of blood stuck to them, as though she had just coughed up blood.

Confronted with this familiar face, shrouded by the shadow of death, Kaito gasped.

Unmistakable. This girl was none other than Elisabeth in her childhood.

(Oh... Surely this isn't something I'm meant to see.)

After realizing this, Kaito inched away backwards and exited the door. As soon as he passed through the door completely, the scene before his eyes dissociated and disappeared like ripples on a calm water surface. All that was left were the mountain of broken toys and the door embedded in the pile of toys.

It looked like he had exited the *child's bedroom* at least. Kaito looked around the "treasure vault" and sighed in relief. However, the creepy voice instantly entered his ear. Without any time to contemplate what he had just witnessed, Kaito turned around and ran. In his confusion, he desperately distanced himself from Elisabeth's childhood image as well as the man's voice that was calling to him obsessively.

(What the heck, cut that out... I-I don't want to know anything.)

Kaito did not want to know what kind of past that the arrogant girl with bizarre behavior had, neither did he expect to be forced to

peek on memories that she herself likely did not want others to know. Although he did not feel any affection for her, he felt that this was a kind of betrayal.

Elisabeth Le Fanu was both a proud wolf and a lowly sow.

She had introduced herself fearlessly in this manner. However, this stood in stark contrast to the feeble girl he had just seen.

Surely, she would not want her servant Kaito to see her looking so weak.

Kaito kept running single-mindedly and reached somewhere with a substantially different atmosphere.

"Huff... Huff... Huff... Where is this... place?"

He might have reached the end. In front of him was a towering wall of stone. Approaching for a closer look, he saw that the wall had a weird structure composed of cubical stones without the slightest gap between them. This wall extended left and right like a world boundary. Here, Kaito noticed something.

"Hmm... What's going on?"

For some reason, part of the wall was illuminated by a circular light. Kaito approached it in trepidation.

On the illuminated wall was a set of iron shackles.

A naked girl's upper body was restrained there, like merchandise hanging on a rack.

"What?"

Surprised, Kaito halted. No matter how many times he looked, it did not seem like an illusion.

A beautiful silver-haired maiden had her arms bound to the wall. The girl had a magnificent bust and her beautiful body of perfect proportions was tragically spread out and displayed.

The instant Kaito laid eyes on her, he felt a slight sense of dissonance for some reason. However, he could not keep staring at a woman's naked body nonstop... It would be a problem too if he was accused of visual rape.

Ignoring the sense of dissonance, Kaito turned his face forcefully away and timidly checked the girl's circumstances from the corner of his eye. The silver-haired girl had her head down and did not move at all.

"Hey, are you okay? Hey? Hey?"

There was no response even when he spoke to her. With no idea why this girl was imprisoned here or how to handle the situation, Kaito hesitated. Judging from Elisabeth's personality, he did not

think she would imprison a demon, so the silver-haired girl was most probably not an enemy.

Even if the girl were an enemy, the only possible victim in this place was Kaito himself.

Even if he left then doubled back, there was no guarantee he would return to the same place. Thinking to himself, Kaito decided that he would rather rescue her now instead of regretting it after leaving this place.

At this point in his thoughts, Kaito decided to release the girl's restraints. He looked around him but there were no useful tools nearby. However, he noticed a leather pouch tied to the girl's slender ankle.

With her arms bound, there was no way for her to take the pouch on her own. This position was quite in poor taste.

Kaito took off the pouch and poured the contents out to check. What fell out was a key and a piece of parchment. Kaito used the key to unlock the girl's handcuffs and her arms fell down limply by the sides of her pale and blemish-free body. However, even after obtaining freedom, the girl showed no signs of moving. Kaito looked around, searching for something to cover up her body and his gaze was drawn to the parchment that had fallen on the ground. Words had been written on the parchment in red in big letters.

"'Instruction manual'? 'Important details during activation'?"

Aided by the golem's functionality, Kaito deciphered the language of this world. Then he began to puzzle. Suddenly realizing a certain possibility, he turned towards the girl and checked her body.

At that moment, he finally figured out the cause of the sense of dissonance.

Upon closer examination, he found that the silver-haired girl's slender limbs were ball-jointed. The straight silver hair was not human hair either, but was made of sparkling shiny silver thread instead.

The girl was a doll. She was probably one of the items kept in the "treasure vault."

In the next instant, the girl's head suddenly jerked up and down with noises then finally, she slowly lifted her face. Made from green gemstones, her eyes glowed with eerie light. Seeing her face, Kaito was struck deeply with fear.

On that beautiful face that was like a work of art, there was no expression at all.

Her facial muscles were completely stiff like a mask.

The girl—the robotic doll—began to spin her limbs in different direction, centered on the ball joints. Seeing this unusual situation, Kaito hastily read the rest of what was written on the parchment.

After reading the words in red ink, he widened his eyes and kicked the ground.

—Please take care, the doll attacks people upon activation.

Kaito began to run as fast as he could.

He could hear the doll crawling on the ground, chasing after him at high speed.

\* \* \*

Kaito made a mad dash as though competing in an obstacle race. He jumped over chairs, squeezed through gaps between cupboards, slid down mountains of gold coins, and his suspicions proved to be correct.

The doll charged straight at Kaito without any awareness of avoiding obstacles. The more objects that needed to be destroyed, the more time required by the doll to move. In this manner, Kaito succeeded in creating some distance and continued to escape. However, he knew very well that a moment's complacency and he would be joining the ranks of those destroyed objects.

(What the hell!? This is no joke at all!)

Kaito rushed up to the final step with vigor that tore his leg muscles. Ignoring the searing pain, he compelled his body to move through sheer force of will. All would be lost if he looked back. Also, he had nothing that could serve as a shield.

Suppressing his surging fear, he managed to make it to the black door alive. However, the great door remained shut tightly. Clenching his fist to bang hard on the door, Kaito yelled in a panic.

"Elisabeth, hurry and open the door! Open the door for me now!"

"What is the matter, Kaito? Have you finally learned your lesson? From now on, do remember to give your cooking a proper taste test before bringing it to the table."

"I knew it, you were planning to punish me from the start! Anyway, forget about that for now, hurry up and open the door!"

Instantly, Kaito felt a terrifying chill as though his heart was pricked by needles.

He instinctively ducked down into a prone posture. Immediately, the doll's leg swept horizontally over his head. This attack was as swift and fierce as a snake's. The tip of the foot approached from an unbelievable angle, shattering the sturdy door. Elisabeth began to panic, yelling through the door:

"W-What on earth is this common?"

Hearing Elisabeth's exclamation of surprise, Kaito ignored getting injured and charged through the flying shrapnel, throwing himself into the throne room, rolling and scurrying along the way, then hastily distancing himself from the treasure vault's entrance. From the door, the doll's pale body, swaying like a ghost, was stumbling out.

Elisabeth had apparently fetched wine on her own and was drinking it, but seeing this situation, she spurted wine from her

mouth. With a speechless expression, rarely seen, she roared angrily:

"Just how deep did you go, you knave! This robotic doll was created by my foster father in poor taste! Since it does not obey commands at all and even destroys everything it sees, it is extremely dangerous! Why did you activate it!?"

"I'm sorry for activating her without asking! But I didn't know she'd start moving as soon as I released her restraints!"

"Releasing the restraints is the signal for activation! You imbecile beyond compare!"

However, there was no time for idle banter.

"Ugh! How vexing! Why must I, Torturchen, feel upset over a mere puppet?"

She impatiently stood up from the throne and tapped the tip of her shoe on the floor twice.

Darkness and petals rolled and spread on the floor like mist, finally conjuring a great number of vertical spikes from below. However, the doll leaped up with astounding reflexes and beast-like jumping power, evading the spikes, then landed unharmed by clamping the tip of one spike between her palm and the sole of her foot.

"No bad. To think it escape this move."

Elisabeth murmured, impressed, then reached behind her and swung her arm forward. Out from the darkness flew an executioner's ax, hurtling straight at the doll's neck. With a clack and movements that seemed to dislocate joints, the doll barely

dodged the ax before her head was chopped off. Elisabeth widened her eyes in surprise.

Bending her knees, the doll jumped again, landing in front of the throne, getting into close range with Elisabeth. Immediately, Elisabeth snapped her fingers as though she had been waiting for this moment.

"Ducking Stool!"

Out from the floor emerged a chair that managed to strike the doll's bottom and immediately restrain the doll with leather straps. The Ducking Stool greatly resembled the interrogation chair that Kaito had been treated to before, but there were no holes on the seat for spikes to come out. Instead, the backrest was tied to a very long chain.

Suddenly, a square-shaped section of the floor around the doll disappeared. The space underneath was instantly filled with water with red petals floating on the surface. With an exaggerated splash, the doll was dropped into the water.

Vigorous bubbling appeared on the surface probably due to the doll's struggles, but suddenly calmed down. With a clonging rattling, the chain was lifted up. The doll sitting on the chair was motionless.

Water dripped from the strands of her silver hair. Only then did Elisabeth exhale in relief.

"My goodness, it finally settled down. However, this thing has a drainage device installed so it will presumably recover automatically soon. It needs to be destroyed before the internal gears start turning again."

"Eh? Wait a sec, is destruction the only option?"

"Is it not obvious? It will go on another rampage unless you break it! Or do you wish to keep escaping from this doll that will lop off your head any time? When the time comes, I shall use you as a meat shield first. No objections, right?"

"No, but all things considered, I'm the one who activated her without permission... It feels a bit of a shame to destroy such an exquisitely crafted doll... Can't we return her to the initial state, deactivated?"

Kaito tried to persuade Elisabeth. Although he was afraid of the doll's terrifying pursuit, ultimately, he was to blame for activating her on his own. He would feel quite guilty about destroying this doll that resembled a human so impeccably. Furthermore, the doll looked very expensive and Kaito did not think he could pay for it even with his life.

Elisabeth opened her lips in displeasure but suddenly suppressed the angry words she was about to deliver.

"Hmm? Hold on. You make a fair point. Breaking the doll would be a waste... Perhaps it could still be put to use."

In front of the contemplative Elisabeth, the doll shuddered mildly, her body making unpleasant mechanical sounds, her head jerking in bizarre movements and angles.

Her green eyes flashed with eerie light again. At the same time, Elisabeth whispered in a sing-song voice:

"O gears, stop turning. You shall remain forever beautiful."

The doll suddenly stopped, losing all strength in the next instant. Having spent so much effort to capture the doll, Elisabeth was now about to put her in such a state with just a few words, shocking Kaito.

"W-What did you do?"

"What I just recited was the incantation for registering a new master. Hmm, it worked, which implies that this thing's previous setting has been cleared. With that, it should be possible to set a new master. Once that is done, this thing should regard its new master's orders as top priority and stop attacking people mindlessly. Well then, to proceed..."

Just as Elisabeth was about say something next, the doll's neck moved bizarrely.

Click click click click click... The neck was bent forcibly for the doll to look at Kaito, causing him to jump in surprise, but the doll simply stared at him silently, her green eyes reflecting nothing but Kaito's image. Feeling she was relying on him, Kaito felt troubled. Sighing briefly, apparently impressed, Elisabeth whistled.

"Good grief... This thing has made its own choice. Rejoice, perhaps because you have saved it twice, you have caught its eye. Very well, you are its master henceforth. However, there is one problem."

"Master? Huh? And there's a problem?"

"Becoming this thing's master requires setting a 'relationship.' This thing's creator is an eccentric who takes pleasure in putting others in difficult situations. You must select the correct answer out of the following four relationships: 'parent-child,' 'siblings,' 'master-servant,' or 'lovers.' Should you choose incorrectly, the robotic doll will direct its killing intent towards the master. I have no issue with it, but you might lose your life."

"A four in one chance of getting the right answer, that's honestly a challenge... What should I do?"

"Who knows? Destroying it would be the most convenient, but you are reluctant to do so. Choose from parent-child, siblings, master-servant or lovers... Hmm, why not pick the choice that seems the least likely to betray you?"

Elisabeth laughed maliciously and sat down on her throne casually.

She was definitely enjoying the current situation. Confused, Kaito desperately racked his brain. No matter what, this answer was a matter of life and death for him. Since his father had killed him, forget about parent-child. As for siblings, he did not have much of an idea. He had met a man who was supposedly blood related, but no good memories came out of it. Master-servant... That would be his current relationship with Elisabeth, hence ruled out. That left only one remaining choice.

"Lovers, I guess."

"You must be a virgin."

—What the hell are you asserting? However, before Kaito could protest against Elisabeth's slander, the doll's body began to shake violently as never before. Convulsing uncontrollably, she caused the leather straps restraining her to fly off. Hot gas was discharged from gaps in the ball joints.

Due to her excessively intense reaction, Kaito involuntarily worried about the doll instead of himself.

"Hey, you didn't break, did you?"

He timidly looked down to check the doll. The doll suddenly opened her eyes, ripped the Ducking Stool's straps and jumped lightly out of the water tank, landing before Kaito.

*Aww man, I'm dead meat now...* Just as Kaito prepared himself...

The doll suddenly knelt down on one knee in front of Kaito.

"Huh?"

"Thank you for your patience, my dear, my love, my destiny, my liege! My true lover! My eternal companion!"

The doll cried out in an extremely emotional voice. Hearing her voice for the first time, Kaito found it lovely and pleasing. The doll grasped Kaito's hand tightly and looked up.

Framed by her smooth sleek silver hair, her face was making expressions that she had never shown before.

On her emerald eyes, her eyelids lowered gently and beautifully. Her pale cheeks blushed lightly. The doll's sweet face, innocent yet no less gorgeous, showed an expression of rapture and intoxication.

With very human motions, she started rubbing Kaito's palm against her cheek. Her delicate skin felt tender and warm like a real person's. In utter bliss, the doll whispered softly:



"From hereon ever after, until my limbs are broken and severed, until my head is chopped off, until my iron heart stops beating, I shall be your lover always, your companion. I live only for you and will break only for you. Loving me, stopping me, and doing anything else to me is the privilege enjoyed by you alone only."

Gazing straight at Kaito, she then smiled shyly.

"Please enjoy me any time as it suits yourself. Please love me tenderly forever and ever, okay?"

Faced with this endless torrent of words, Kaito and Elisabeth were stunned. Unconcerned with their response or lack thereof, the doll continued to rub Kaito's palm against her cheek. This endearing behavior was like a puppy seeking affection.

Soon after, Elisabeth murmured:

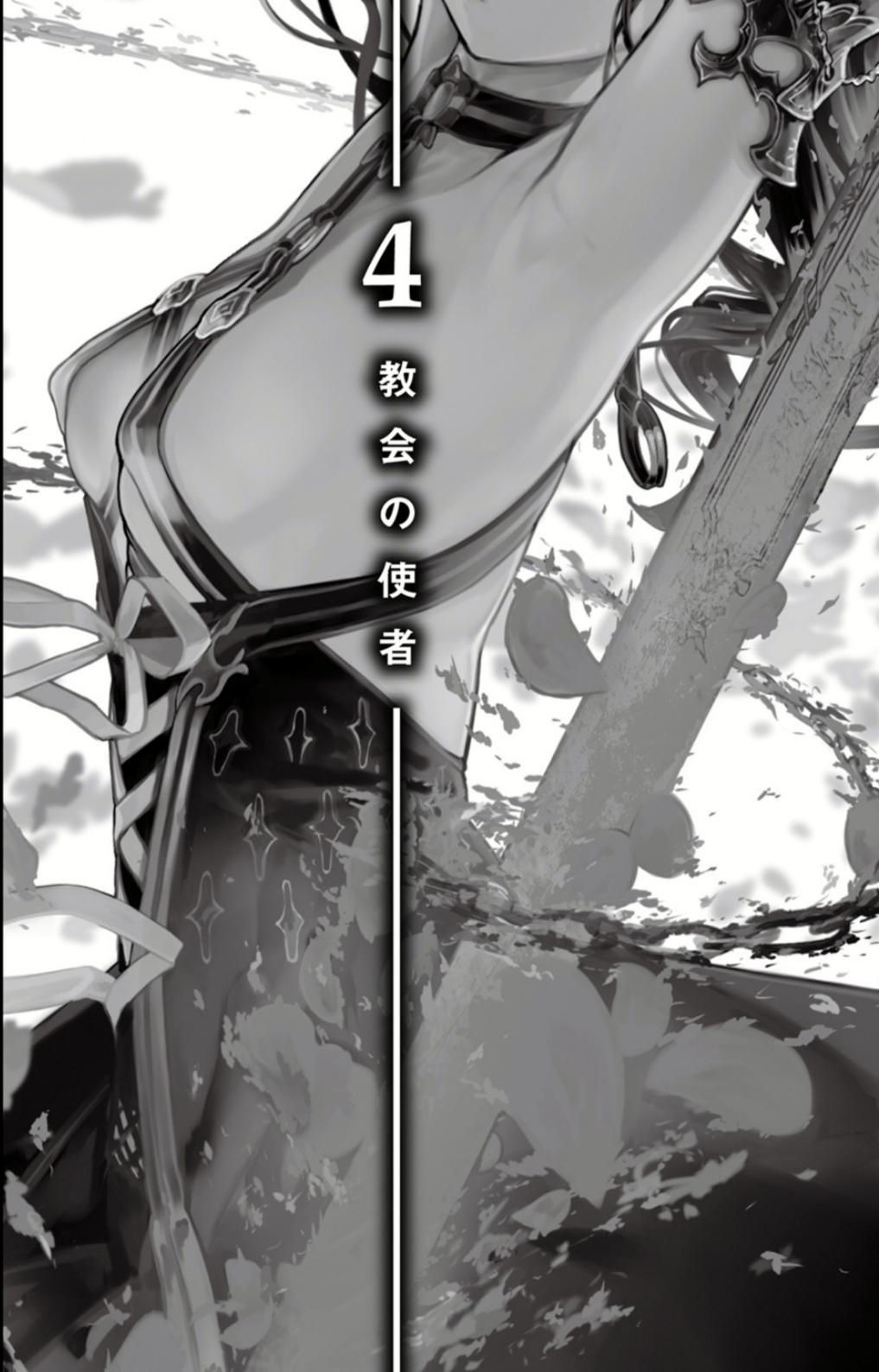
".....I-It would seem that you picked the correct answer. A-Are you happy now?"

".....Uh... W-Well, inevitably..."

—It feels like this will inevitably become very troublesome too.

Confronted with the doll's look of bliss, Kaito gulped these words down his throat.

# 4 教会の使者



## Chapter 4 - Messenger from the Church

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"Delicious!"

Holding a knife and a fork in her hands, Elisabeth smiled radiantly.

Seeing her smile so innocently for the first time, this unusual situation made Kaito feel goosebumps forming on his back. Furthermore, Elisabeth's reaction was not the only change. There were many changes on the dining table too.

On the long table, the sticky tablecloth with vine patterns had been replaced with a new one with colorful fresh flowers placed in front of the unoccupied seats. Gold and silver candlesticks alternated, all lit to provide candle light, with plenty of silverware shining serenely.

And on the plates, many meticulously prepared dishes were giving off lovely aromas.

Head cheese paired with brioche. Sour and refreshing sausage salad. Minestrone with lamb tripe. Kidney pie baked to a golden color. Foie gras terrine.

Then there was dessert, a tart covered with thin apple slices arranged like a flower.

Elisabeth was ravenously enjoying the dishes that were served one after another, her eyes welling up with tears of emotion in an exaggerated manner.

"Delicious, wonderfully delicious, this is too amazing! Absolutely divine! Well done, doll!"

"I am honored that the food is to your liking, Lady Elisabeth, Lord Kaito's master."

The robot doll was waiting on Elisabeth innocently, her emerald eyes full of gentle light, a demure smile on her lips. She was dressed in a classical maid uniform with a very long hem with an adorable maid cap on her head, looking like a servant who had been working at this castle for many years.

Kaito found it inconceivable that she was the same person as the one who had attacked him yesterday.

Despite lingering fears, Kaito still asked her in trepidation:

"Not only can you fight, but you can cook too?"

"Yes. In addition to combat data, stored within the memory of my recorder are various skills useful in all kinds of situations including thousands of recipes. From cooking and cleaning to games of the night, I am able to satisfy your every need and desire at any moment, Lord Kaito."

"No no no, forget about that. Excessive service is a bit much."

Kaito waved his hands. He often felt lost when interacting with this doll. But immediately, she became depressed like a puppy with drooping ears and tail.

"Is that so...? Please tell me immediately if you change your mind, okay? My body is yours, Lord Kaito. I have no greater joy than for you to do with me as you please, any time, anywhere."

"Any time, anywhere... Uh, so that includes outdoors?"

"Of course, outdoors is fine too!"

"What nonsense are you two talking about?"

Cutting the tart into large mouthfuls to chew, Elisabeth called out in exasperation. Aftering enjoying the sweet texture the crispy crust left on her lips and teeth, as well as the complex symphony of gamey flavors from internal organs, she ended her meal.

Wiping her dainty lips carefully with a napkin, she looked approvingly at the doll.

"Hmm, I never thought your culinary skills would be so superb back when the foolish butler activated you and I was thinking my only choice was to destroy you along with that idiot. What a blessing in disguise. Rejoice, Kaito, know that your miserable life has been extended."

"I never thought I would've been almost killed by you unknowingly."

"In that case, it means I was able to help Lord Kaito? Thank you very much, there is no greater honor and happiness for me than this!"

"Hence, you are my servant too... No, but I should respect your wishes in this regard, so allow me to welcome you anew, as my follower's follower..... Kaito, bestow a name upon her."

"A name?"

"Why are you always surprised? Everything needs a name. Would it not be inconvenient if your own possession lacks a name for you to call it?"

"No, I never thought of her as my possession. Even though she's a doll, she's still a girl after all."

Saying that, Kaito shook his head. It felt too great a responsibility for him to take possession of something that seemed no different from a human. However, the doll pouted and took a step forward with both fists clenched.

Pouting adorably, she objected desperately.

"Pray forgive me for being forward, but I am yours, Lord Kaito. Starting from that moment of destiny when you recognized me as your *lover*, I am eternally yours, Lord Kaito, your companion, soldier, weapon, pet plaything and sex toy. My body belongs only to you alone at all times. Please bear this in mind." "I know, so stop making these shocking speeches all the time. Hmm... Anyway, I definitely want you to have a name... Uh."

Pressing his hand on his forehead, Kaito began to think, desperately looking for reference material from his memories. However, he had never had the experience of naming a person or an animal. Furthermore, his social interactions were highly restricted. He recalled the names of several women who had stayed with his father, but he did not want to use them for reference. Even the woman who had made pudding for him ended up abandoning him after all.

At that moment, Kaito suddenly remembered the soft feeling when the doll had rubbed her cheek on his palm.

(...Oh, speaking of which, there was this one individual who was willing to get close to me unconditionally.)

The memory of a pure-white puppy surfaced. It was a neighbor's female puppy that had been very affectionate with Kaito. Every time Kaito went over, she would wag her tail and lick away Kaito's tears. Kaito's time with her was limited to a brief period before he had to move homes again, but Kaito remembered her very clearly. Kaito's father was someone who would abduct the puppy and kill her cruelly if he were to find out that she got along well with his son.

After pondering for a while, Kaito recalled the puppy's name and said:

"Hina... How about Hina?"

"That feels rather sloppy and totally something you thought up on the spot."

"I-I racked my brain desperately, okay!"

"Nothing less expected from Lord Kaito! To think that you came up with a wonderful name that exceeds all humans, demi-humans, beast folk, phantasmal beasts and the gods across heaven and earth! My gratitude knows no bounds so please call me Hina from now on, okay? Hina... Hina, I am Hina. The name that Lord Kaito chose for me... Gufufufufufu."

Hina's shoulders began to shake a little eerily. This seemed to be a happy reaction, but Kaito found it a little scary.

Just as he finished naming Hina, the Meat Supplier happened to arrive. Elisabeth bought a great quantity of innards from him and handed them to Hina. Kaito began to pick up the utensils in his arms.

Now that she had gained an excellent chef, Elisabeth seemed to have a lot to chat about. While she was happily engaged in conversation with the Meat Supplier, Kaito bowed to Elisabeth before heading to the kitchen with Hina.

At the kitchen, Kaito placed the dirty utensils and cutlery in the sink. Hina swiftly handled the innards received from the Meat Supplier and made preparations for dinner.

Seeing her arrange without hesitation the seasoning bottles she was going to use on the counter, Kaito asked:

"Hina, you're able to distinguish all these flavors?"

"Yes, I have essentially registered all seasonings existing in this world. Also, through scent, I can analyze subtle changes in flavor due to degradation over time or the preparation process, allowing me to make quantity adjustments any time."

"I see. You're so amazing, Hina."

Impressed, Kaito nodded with an honest attitude. Hina fidgeted shyly and blushed bright red.

"I am not worthy of your praise. By the way, Lord Kaito, what kind of dishes do you prefer?"

"...Well... Let's say that I'm not too particular about food. As long as it's edible, not rotten and not poisoned, I guess?"

After all, in Kaito's previous life, food was simply food. He was already satisfied with just being able to eat his fill. Hearing Kaito's extremely vague answer, Hina nodded with a serious look.

"I see, I understand now. Then I will do everything I can with my unique flavors to make food delicious for you, Lord Kaito. Then, suppose... pardon me for being bold, but if you happen to like the food I make, Lord Kaito... Ahhh, if such a glorious day should ever arrive for real, I... could die with no regrets!"

"Don't get too excited, Hina, I wouldn't want you to die from something like that."

"As you wish! I shall live, forever and ever!"

Hina nodded with a blush, murmuring "I can't believe Lord Kaito asked me to stay by his side forever..." Her body began to squirm. Looking at her large bust, wobbling up and down, Kaito felt a little troubled, but with this, he no longer needed to spend time alone in this claustrophobic kitchen that was like a dungeon cell.

(At least I've got someone to talk to. It feels so much better.)

Kaito nodded and opened the sink faucet. The castle's pipes were connected to a reservoir that had a water spirit, so even though it did not supply hot water, which was a pain sometimes, the fact that there was a free-flowing supply of water was enough to celebrate already.

Kaito used cold water for dishwashing while Hina skillfully employed the kitchen knife next to him to handle the innards. In almost no time, the organs were all cleaned, had unwanted parts removed, and were cut into appropriately sized pieces. Perhaps to avoid causing unnecessary damage to the meat, the cross-sections were very neat and tidy.

Kaito subconsciously stopped what he was working on and stared at her excellent knife work. At that moment, Elisabeth called out.

"Butler, butler!"

"....."

"Kaito!"

"You're being loud! What's the matter!?"

Kaito put down the wet dishes, left the remaining work to Hina then rushed out.

He originally thought Elisabeth would be at the throne room, but she was still in the dining hall.

Kaito pushed the door open, only to see her sitting on a cabriole-leg chair, waving a wine glass while crossing her legs unhappily. In front of her was a new visitor, sitting where the Meat Supplier had been earlier.

"This man apparently wishes to have a word with you."

"Hello, nice to meet you... Sena Kaito, isn't it right?"

It was a blond man with blue eyes, deep-set features, and dressed in a black cassock.

The man narrowed his gentle eyes that were reminiscent of a goat's. Confronted with the suspicious looking fact, Kaito felt his spine tremble with an ominous feeling. At that moment, he noticed that the man had spoken his name fluently, pronouncing the kanji with accuracy.

Kaito did not know if the man had noticed the unease in Kaito's heart, but he spoke with dignity:

"My name is Krulus Ray Fownd, from the Church. I have come to inquire of your personal particulars."

\* \* \*

".....Come again?"

"Elisabeth. As expected of your servant. His attitude is most similar to yours."

The man spoke in a tone that could be either impressed or surprised. Kaito took a closer look at Krulus, this man who claimed to be from the Church.

Kaito did not know much about the Church in this world. However, since it was the Church that had suspended Elisabeth's death sentence and ordered her to hunt demons, it must wield considerable authority. In the face of authority, Kaito's natural

instinct was to run the hell away, but fleeing at this moment would be way too suspicious, so he forcibly stopped his ankles that had automatically turned halfway and used his eyes to ask the visitor "What do you want to ask about?"

Krulus stood up from his chair and straightened his back, then offered an unexpected suggestion.

"Well then, would you paying the Church a visit next? This castle is rather dark and puts me ill at ease if I had to speak with you here."

"Eh? But I'm Lady Elisabeth's butler and can't just leave without permission."

"You knave, insisting you are my servant only when it suits you... But indeed, you are correct. Krulus, I cannot allow you to take away my servant so easily. I created him and despite his stupidity, he does have a very capable robot doll for a companion, which means he is not free to do as he pleases. I prohibit him from leaving without sufficient reason."



"So this is the attitude you are taking, Elisabeth? You have yet to report to us regarding the matter of you summoning a human soul from *another world*, have you?"

Elisabeth's lips twisted silently when she heard Krulus. He was evidently right on the mark. To think that the fact that she had summoned a human from another world had been exposed, Kaito was quite shocked.

Krulus brought his large palms together and continued:

"However, I have no wish to go out of my way to report this to the higher-ups. Hearing news that you had taken care of The Knight and The Earl, I came over here in the name of 'inquiring about the details' but ultimately, this visit is unofficial. Prior to bureaucratic procedures and punishment becoming unavoidable, wouldn't you agree that it would be more constructive if we were to discreetly confirm matters between us first? Hence, I hope you would grant him permission to go with me. What do you say?"

"Hah, you can spare me this sort of farce. Despite all your pretty words, ultimately what you seek is a way to take him away, am I wrong? Bah, so be it, what a hassle. I grant my permission, but should you fail to return him, watch out for your measly life."

"Good girl, how obedient. You made a wise judgment call."

Kaito was quite surprised by their conversation. To think that someone could face Elisabeth fearlessly, that was quite beyond his expectation. Krulus nodded at Kaito and walked out.

Based on the direction of their dialogue, it looked like Kaito was permitted to go with Krulus.

Neither of them seemed to need Kaito's opinion at all.

With feelings of abandonment and resignation, Kaito obediently followed the cassock-wearing Krulus. Led by Krulus, he entered an underground passage leading to Elisabeth's teleportation magic circle. Originally expecting to go outdoors, Kaito frowned. Krulus stopped in front of the teleportation magic circle and turned to face Kaito.

"Kaito, shall we set off? Be careful of dizziness."

Krulus took out a heavy and blackened silver pendant from inside his cassock. Hanging at the bottom of the thick chain was a sculpture of a veiled woman suspended upside down. Ignoring gravity, the intricately sculpted veil remained upright to cover the woman's face tightly.

"Guide us along the right path."

Krulus held up the pendant in the center of the magic circle, causing the words of blood began to shine. A great many droplets of red liquid became suspended in the air before glowing blue and rotating around them like planets. When the spinning reached maximum speed, the blue light suddenly stopped and everything fell to the ground.

After this blue rain, what appeared before their eyes was an underground room but the atmosphere was different from before.

"...This place is..."

This was apparently not Elisabeth's underground room, but somewhere else. The wall's reinforced concrete was flaking, giving off a different feeling of oppressiveness compared to stone. The air was damp and cold, a strong reminder of their underground location.

"Come, we have arrived. Kaito, here we go."

Krulus returned the pendant to inside his cassock and walked out the only door.

Reinforced with wooden beams, the tunnel-like passage extended to the left and right. Under the low ceiling, ancient lanterns lit with magical fire were swaying. Overall, it felt like a mine tunnel.

The two of them advanced, surrounded by the smell of earth and half-rotten wood. Krulus said quietly:

"This is a secret underground passage of the Church and also connects to my private room. Over here."

At the far end of the passage was a small room that was astoundingly crude. The interior of the wooden room only contained bookshelves and a work desk. Empty. However, the wall was adorned with the same sculpture of the veiled woman hanging upside down that Krulus had taken out earlier. Looking at it up close, Kaito could see a single trail of red tears flowing down the woman's face.

Krulus knelt down in front of the sculpture and started to pray devoutly without heeding Kaito. After a short while, Krulus finally stood up.

"Sorry for making you wait. Very well, please sit wherever you wish."

"Oh, thanks."

Kaito obeyed and sat down on the chair at the desk. Krulus picked up a porcelain teapot on the desk and poured a pale red liquid into a teacup. A refreshing minty scent wafted in the air.

"I enjoy this kind of tea. Every time I frequent the store, I would buy out their entire stock."

"Uh... Sure, well, I think it's a nice hobby."

"Haha, is that so? I am very happy to hear that from someone else. My subordinates are always yelling at me, saying I buy too much."

Krulus winked. Even though his behavior was very human, Kaito still did not relax. The conversation was flowing too smoothly, it made him feel somewhat terrified.

Krulus brought his own chair over and sat down in front of the work desk, face to face with Kaito.

"This feels like an interrogation."

Kaito muttered to himself. Krulus took a sip of tea and started speaking:

"Even though it was in the form of a servant, I never thought someone from another world would get roped into Elisabeth's demon hunt."

"Uh, Elisabeth basically told me nothing and I'm a bit curious about this myself. Is it a very rare thing for people from another world to be summoned here?"

"She did not explain to you? How irresponsible, but that would be Elisabeth's style. This is extremely uncommon, much less rare. It is said that a sharing of memories would occur during the summoning process, so I presume you must be an excellent match for Elisabeth's wavelength. Or perhaps, you two are quite similar in nature."

"Me, similar to her?"

Kaito could not help but frown. He did not consider himself the slightest bit similar to the arrogant and haughty Elisabeth. Krulus took a sip of tea and shook his head.

"Forgive me, I have misspoken. Of course, I do not think you two are similar, because from what I have heard, Elisabeth Le Fanu was a cruel girl since childhood."

Hearing this, Kaito jumped in surprise. The images of the girl he had seen recently flashed through his mind.

That skinny and sickly girl, sitting on the bed with very hollow eyes.

Kaito shook his head, dispelling the image from his mind. Ignoring his discomposure, Krulus next said:

"She was born into this world as the only daughter of the prestigious noble house of Le Fanu. Sickly since childhood, she had a cruel nature and would take pleasure in breaking toys and killing small animals. After the age of sixteen, her personality was

exhibited fully in a terrifying manner. Tirelessly, she tortured people, obtaining magical power at the cost of other's pain and suffering. Then using that evil power, she slaughtered even more people. Set in her cruel and horrific ways, she does not even fear God."

Krulus gripped his porcelain teacup tightly. In his blue eyes, a vicious glint surfaced. Kaito noticed prickly hostility in his tone. Even though he had been chatting amiably with Elisabeth earlier, judging from what he just said, Kaito could sense clear resentment.

While frowning at his intense reaction, Kaito was struck by a question.

Obtaining magical power at the cost of other's pain and suffering— This was practically like a demon. However, Elisabeth Le Fanu was not "Torturchen," not a demon.

"Elisabeth isn't one of the fourteen demons, right?"

"Indeed, you are right. She accomplished all that on her own without forming a contract with anyone. Despite clearly not using the power of demons, how exactly did she convert other people's pain and suffering into her own magical power? The specific method is known only to the high priest. However, this is the truth. She is an evil woman possessed power surpassing demons. Her existence itself constitutes endless sacrilege against the world."

Krulus cursed viciously. What he said might be true but Kaito hesitated, not knowing how to answer. Elisabeth was Torturchen, an oppressive ruler and a tyrant. However, she was currently hunting demons. There were probably very few people who were capable of opposing the demons, creators of hell in this world.

And Kaito was currently in the position of assisting her.

Ever since the incident of The Earl, he no longer hated serving at her side despite frequently acting defiant against Elisabeth as always. Kaito was actually quite delighted by her innocent side that she displayed occasionally.

This was the truth despite its twistedness.

Deliberating to the end, Kaito did not concur with Krulus. However, Krulus nodded knowingly for some reason and sighed deeply.

"My apologies for accidentally getting worked up. However, you ought to understand after spending so much time with her. Very well, allow me to inquire about your world next, shall we? From what I have heard, machinery is more advanced than magic in your world?"

"Yeah, that's right. To be precise, there's virtually no magic in my world... Normally speaking."

Kaito answered Krulus' question calmly. However, Kaito's knowledge from life was quite skewed. Despite enjoying the fruits and conveniences of industrial technology, he did not understand the underlying principles of how they worked. The conversation turned vague, but Krulus still listened with great interest. He finished his tea and calmly shook his head.

"Thank you very much, it was most informative. However, I must offer my utmost condolences. The battles with demons will only intensify from hereon. I honestly do not believe you will be able to survive until Elisabeth finishes killing those thirteen demons."

"I knew it, huh? Although this body is immortal after all, but it does seem quite difficult."

"Indeed. And even supposing you survived to the end, what awaits you is the Church's inquisition for heretics."

"What?"

Hearing something unexpected, Kaito exclaimed in surprise. Confronted by Kaito's natural response, Krulus remained unfazed. His blue eyes, staring straight at Kaito, had no emotion.

This was the kind of gaze one would give to despised bugs, not a human being of equal stature.

"What are you so surprised for? That is a most logical outcome. According to the ways of the Church, there is no way that a puppet created by her would be allowed to live after 'Torturchen' Elisabeth accomplishes her mission. You too shall be put to death by fire, or face incarceration at best. But before that, what awaits you is prolonged torture."

"Well... To be honest, that's not really acceptable to me. I was only roped in against my will. Aren't you guys the ones doing the torturing? Can't you find a solution for me?"

"Here, I have one proposal."

Krulus leaned forward slightly. At that moment, Kaito felt the same sense of dissonance as before and finally found the last piece of the puzzle. Since a while ago, he had a feeling that the conversation so far was just a farce leading to something else. Despite concurring very earnestly, Krulus was not seriously listening to anything he said. This feeling was evidently not his imagination.

"There are solutions. As I gradually dwelled deeper in my unofficial surveillance and visits, I came to realize more and more how dangerous Elisabeth is. Back when she was captured by the Church, she was fitted with restraints to prevent her from counterattacking or escaping. However, if Torturchen were to enter a contract with any one of the thirteen demons, her power would be amplified dramatically, allowing her to break free of her restraints. Not only that, but if Torturchen's unique power were to combine with a demon's, the result would be most unthinkable."

"Do you guys have any way of fighting her if she does that?"

"One of the top officials in the Church, His Excellency Godot Dios, has taken an oath to guarantee that she will not enter a contract with a demon. If developments actually unfold to that stage, he would sacrifice his own life to seal her... His Excellency is definitely capable of that, but should that come to pass, we would lose a great man of the cloth. We cannot passively accept the arrival of an expected and inevitable disaster, watching the birth of a new demon surpassing all other demons without doing anything."

Krulus reached into his cassock and once again took out the necklace of the female martyr that was hung upside down. He carefully opened a cap on the back and took out a bottle, then poured the contents into Kaito's teacup. The colorless and transparent droplets, akin to tears, produced ripples inside the teacup. In the next instant, the pale red tea turned deep purple before returning to its original color.

"Let Elisabeth drink this poison. In exchange, I will grant you a peaceful death."

"Death?"

"Indeed. Beings counter to the will of God are not permitted to live. But according to your testimony, you were already dead before you were summoned, is that right? Currently staying at her side, you must be no stranger to the fear of pain. You should be able to understand that this is not a transaction that runs counter to your interests, right?"

Krulus smiled. Kaito recalled the poor first impression he had of Krulus and understood even more now. Krulus was quite arrogant and even more, he was unaware of his own arrogance, looking down at Kaito from absolute height. From his own perspective, this proposal was genuine mercy.

Kaito carefully suppressed an impulse to curse and decided to stay silent until he was allowed to go back to the castle.

Seeing that Kaito had not agreed readily, Krulus cocked his head in puzzlement.

"From your reaction, you do not seem very satisfied... To enable you to understand the legitimacy of my proposal, I shall make a special exception and show you the fates of the *heretics* under my management."

Krulus led Kaito to continue downstairs. With quick footsteps, he advanced through the dark passage. There were no other members of the clergy in the passage. Although Kaito felt something was not right about this situation, he still followed Krulus. Soon after, Krulus went up some steps.

At the end of the steps was a very thick door with its edges stuffed with cloth for soundproofing. He grabbed the door handle...

"Watch and listen, then learn properly."

Then he pushed the door open. Instantly, there was a flood of bone-chilling screams.

People were moaning, lamenting, in suffering, pleading madly to be killed. Inside the inquisition room for heretics, there was a heavy stench of blood. The square room was partitioned in half by metal fencing and covered quite a large area.

Presented inside was hell on a small scale.

A man with all his body hair shaved off was stuck to the wall, his pallid skin covered densely with rivets, a great number of screws embedded in his bald head. Even now, there people dressed in white, drilling screws into his flesh. Bound to an operating table, a woman was getting sliced up by a saw, bit by bit, convulsing nonstop. A old man's foot was pressed firmly on a red-hot griddle to roast, convulsing while begging to be killed. A young man was hung up by horse hair tied to his tongue, crying profusely while waiting for his tongue to break.

In addition, there were many people squirming, a total mystery how they could still remain alive. Confronted with such a scene, Kaito widened his eyes in shock, staggering backwards. Even so, he continued to stare intently at the scene before him, imprinting this horrific scene from hell upon his eyes. Despite the intense terror attacking his mind, he remained calm and observed the place.

Dying peacefully was such a merciful proposal.

Kaito understood now, that there was not the slightest exaggeration in Krulus' words.

"I await your good news."

Krulus smiled gently and pressed the bottle of poison into Kaito's hand.

\* \* \*

With the fall of blue rain, Kaito's view opened up.

After returning to Elisabeth's castle alone through the teleportation circle, Kaito instantly fell to his knees.

"...Guh... Urghhh."

The intense dizziness was making him puke. This was a side effect that he had never experienced when teleporting together with Elisabeth. Perhaps when confronted with that scene and the choice presented to him just now, his stomach could not bear the burden.

"Holy cow, that was really... horrific."

Kaito cursed and spat then struggled to stand up. Unsteadily, he entered the underground passage.

Kaito remembered the way back. Knowing from experience that he would never forget any information accompanied by pain, some time ago, he had carved essential portions of the underground passages onto his skin. He then asked Elisabeth to heal him afterwards. Elisabeth had been quite surprised by what Kaito did. Kaito too was in abject pain but as a result, he was able to avoid wasting away and dying due to getting lost.

"Damn it... Is there anything else I have to do after coming back?"

Kaito thought about his remaining work while walking. He expected Hina to have already handled all the daily chores for him, so there should not be anything for which Elisabeth would summon him for today. Elisabeth essentially expressed no concern for Kaito on a daily basis, so even if she was going to ask about Krulus, she would probably wait until tomorrow. There was a ton of stuff to think about, but right now, all Kaito wanted was to rest.

For the rest of today, he did not want to think about the bottle of poison in his chest pocket at all.

Kaito walked unsteadily to the floor reserved for servants and dragged himself to his bedroom. With a creaking of old parts, he opened the thin door.

At that moment, something soft covered his face.

"W-W-What?"

"Welcome home, Lord Kaito! I have been waiting and you finally came home safe and sound!"

Hina was hugging Kaito tightly against her bosom. Meeting Hina as soon as he opened the door, Kaito was naturally quite startled.

Leaning forward slightly, hugged by the tall Hina tightly, Kaito's face ended up buried in her chest. Kaito hastily pulled his face away, only to see Hina staring at him with sorrowful eyes like a puppy. Kaito had tried using this type of gaze against Elisabeth to no effect, but when Hina gazed at him like this, he could not help but hold his breath.

Unsure what to say, Kaito moved his shifty gaze away from Hina. Even though there were a chair and a bed in this cramped room, there were no signs that they had been used. In front of the puzzled Kaito, Hina danced a little.

"Lady Elisabeth said you will surely return, so I have been waiting for your arrival eagerly. I was so worried, worrying so much that my chest was about to burst and my gears fly out."

"Say, Hina... Don't tell me you've been standing here waiting for me the whole time ever since you finished today's chores?"

"Yes, I did. Is there any problem?"

"Uh... You could sit down while waiting for me. I won't be mad even if you took a nap."

As soon as she heard Kaito, Hina stumbled unsteadily. With her hand over her mouth, she blushed intensely.

"I-I cannot believe you permitted me to sleep in the exalted master's bed... C-C-C-Could this be the lover's privilege... No, we are already akin to husband and wife, so this would be a subtle invitation?"

"Of course not. I don't have the energy to entertain you now... Sorry."

Kaito pushed Hina away gently and collapsed on the bed. At that moment, he noticed something was different. The bed Elisabeth had given him originally had a musty smell and was hard and damp, but now it was quite soft with a pleasant fragrance of herbs. Hina must have carefully washed and dried the mattress. However, Kaito did not have the strength to thank her now.

In his confusion, Kaito shut his eyes tight. Despite this comfortable bed, he still might be leaving the castle... as a traitor who had killed his master, to die in peace as a reward. But no matter how Kaito tried, he could not imagine the scene of himself killing Elisabeth.

(She's a girl who will walk to her execution on her own.)

She was neither a girl who would be killed by Kaito nor killed by anyone else. However, if Kaito were to reject the proposal, his final fate might be unthinkable. Kaito gripped the bottle of poison through his pocket.

At that moment, the bed creaked and a sweet fragrance drifted to him. Even without opening his eyes, Kaito knew that Hina had lay down next to him. He sighed and spoke again:

"...Listen to me, Hina, I'm really..."

"Excuse me, Lord Kaito."

Kaito was then hugged gently against her bosom. Hina embraced his head lightly, caressing his hair. She was comforting Kaito, combing his hair nonstop, doing all this in a non-sexual manner. Surprised, Kaito opened his eyes.

With her emerald eyes partially closed, Hina was leaning against Kaito, looking at him with sincere love and affection. Seeing that tender look on her face, incomparably gentle like a wife consoling her husband, Kaito found himself speechless.

"You seem exhausted. As your lover, I should look after my beloved like this."

Gently, Hina kept caressing Kaito's hair. Kaito could not help but think... So this is what kids felt when their mother stroked their head. Her hand's warmth was transmitted to him and Kaito's heart naturally warmed up too. This warmth transcended language and reason, making the taut threads in his heart begin to loosen.

Surrounded by clean sheets and the tenderness and warmth of human skin, Kaito felt his eyelids grow heavy all of a sudden.

"...Hina, if you do this, I'll fall asleep."

"Is there anything wrong with that? Please relax and sleep. Please rest assured, Lord Kaito."



—No matter what happens, I will protect you.

The instant he heard these whispers, the taut threads were finally unraveled. Only now did he realize he was afraid when confronted with the hell presented to him and the fate shoved before his eyes. It looked like the terror instilled upon Kaito by that utterly brutal *death* had not subsided even after his return.

(Ahhh... I see, I'm afraid.)

No one could be sure what was going to happen next, but at least, this place was safe for now. Currently, Kaito's body was not in pain. Furthermore, Hina had told him that she would eliminate everyone that wanted to harm him.

In his previous life, Kaito had never had the experience of being protected by anyone. To relax like this could very well be the very first time in his life. He never thought he could feel such comfort just before death.

While thinking these thoughts, he was plunged into the land of dreams as though gradually sucked away.

He had a dream.

It was a dream where he could tell it was a dream.

All kinds of images and sensations were recreated in his eyes and on his skin kaleidoscopically then disappearing.

Countless wounds. Intense sorrow suppressed all the time. Every mistake at work resulted in the words "never forget" carved on his skin. Gently licking his wounds, a little warm tongue. Big eyes, as though saying "I love you" to Kaito who was like trash. Under strangulation, the despair and lamentation at the moment that his neck broke. The pain that could not even be screamed out. The armor bulging with flesh inside, The Knight's eyes, the terrifying spider, Neue's almost crying smile.

The first words dedicated to him. His words to Kaito.

Even if impossible to achieve, Kaito still wanted to strive for it, the wish from Neue to him.

Staring out the window, the image of the feeble girl. Cruelly slaughtered people. The evil girl laughing.

Sounds from somewhere.

'Back when she was captured by the Church, she was fitted with restraints to prevent her from counterattacking or escaping. However, if Torturchen were to enter a contract with any one of the thirteen demons, her power would be amplified dramatically,

allowing her to break free of her restraints. Should that come to pass, it would usher the birth of a new demon surpassing all other demons.'

'Stop making me laugh, Earl.'

'Whether you or I—Both of us are to be forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth, to ultimately die.'

'Cruel and proud, I extol life like a wolf, and will ultimately die like a sow.'

'—This is preordained.'

Sleek, black, long hair fluttering in the air. Elisabeth turning around. Kaito thought to himself... Thinking in his dream...

Oh, right. You...

You're not gonna run away, right?

Regardless what kind of despair and suffering awaited her, she was going to shoulder her life responsibilities.

As "Torturchen," Elisabeth Le Fanu was going to—

Take full responsibility for her utterly atrocious life.

Then Kaito slowly opened his eyes.

Hina was still hugging him tightly, caressing his head. On her face was a faint and especially happy smile.

While stroking Kaito, Hina could not do anything else. Kaito felt sorry that he had inconvenienced her and hastily sat up. Hina seemed disappointed and looked up again at Kaito, tilting her head.

"Have you calmed down? Color has returned to your face a little."

"Yeah, thank you, Hina. It's thanks to you that things now make sense in my mind."

Kaito jumped off the bed and was about to leave the room directly. Hina seemed to notice something and did not chase after him. Kaito paused and turned around.

Hina was sitting on the bed, seeing Kaito off with a happy look on her face. Standing at the doorway, Kaito spontaneously asked her:

"Will you be sad if I died, Hina?"

"In the event that you should die, Lord Kaito, I will die too, you know?"

"No no no no, that's just not right."

"Because I have no wish to live even an extra second in a world with you, Lord Kaito."

Hina was showing a surprised look as though saying "Isn't that perfectly matter-of-fact?"

Feeling a headache, Kaito clutched his forehead. Her answer was too unexpected. Kaito did not know how he was going to end up in the future, but decided he had to persuade her not to follow him in death no matter what. But for now, he returned to the bedside, reached out and stroked her silver hair. Hina closed her eyes happily and drew her face near affectionately.

(I knew it, this expression is so similar to that puppy that offered me pure affection and goodwill in the past.)

Savoring her words, Kaito gritted his teeth and muttered.

"I see. Then I have to survive as much as possible."

Leaving the room, he ran along the corridor to go find Elisabeth.

\* \* \*

Elisabeth was at the throne room. Sitting in front of the collapsed hole, she was looking out to the full moon on her own.

Presently, the dark forest was rustling and swaying in the wind.

At the spot where the beasts had been skewered, not a single fragment of the corpses had remained. However, burn marks stuck

stubbornly to the ground and the patch of earth still seemed to glint with a bloody tint even at night. However, these lingering traces would eventually end up covered by trees, presumably.

"What happened to the beast's flesh in the end?"

"Burned away at the same time as The Knight's demise. Putting that aside, how about watching the sky too?"

Elisabeth answered without looking back at him. Raising an expensive wine glass from a small table, she swirled the aromatic and exquisite wine in it.

The magnificent full moon was reflected on the red liquid's surface.

"Tonight's moon is very beautiful."

Elisabeth finished the wine with the moon's reflection in it then lowered her glass.

Kaito brought a well-chilled bottle of wine from a silver utensil containing ice created by a spirit. Refilling the glass, he took out the bottle of poison from his pocket. When the colorless droplet was added to the wine, the wine turned from silky red to a poisonous purple for a moment before turning back as though nothing had happened.

Kaito handed this glass of wine to Elisabeth, who had observed the entire process.

Raising the glass to the moonlight, she curled her red and luscious lips.

"How amusing. What are you doing?"

"Poisoning you."

"Oh? Now that is rather rich. If I were to drink this, even one such as I would be hard pressed to escape fatality. Fine wine is not easy to come by, so I shall gift this to you. Do know that this is fine wine from the master as a gift, so you would do well to drink it with gratitude."

"Please allow me to refuse firmly. I will be wasting this wine."

"Was it Krulus? What kind of terms did he offer you? A peaceful death?"

"Heh, you really know your stuff."

"Well, at this rate, whether you live or die, it would undoubtedly be hell for you."

Elisabeth spoke calmly and candidly. It looked like she had completely predicted the final fate Kaito faced. However, rather than hiding it, she simply thought nothing of it, which was why she had not worried about it all this time.

Placing the glass on the table, Elisabeth shrugged ostentatiously.

"To make a deal with him would be plenty foolish. There is no escaping death either way. However, the basic terms are not bad. If you seek asylum from the Church organization instead of Krulus personally, there is a rather high chance of finding mercy including a guarantee of your life from now on, as long as you are not caught by individual fanatics."

"Huh?"

"No matter what, you are from another world. Putting you to trial to determine whether you are a heretic or not would be utterly ridiculous. If you survive until all thirteen demons are killed, you would be deemed my possession, but it is not too late if you do it now. Hina's knowledge should be sufficient to activate the teleportation circle and connect to the Church. Make your choice as it suits you."

"So basically... You don't mind if I run away now?"

"How could I not mind? You are my puppet and belong to me until the moment of your destruction. Nevertheless, even though you are simply meddling in what does not concern you, I would spend my days uncomfortably if I failed to repay the pity from a little servant like you. Do as you wish, but do it secretly if you are running away. If I catch you, prepare yourself to be tortured."

Elisabeth yawned and crossed her legs high. She exhaled lightly and leaned back against her throne. The moonlight was shining on her face, her profile as beautiful as a blade.

She did not want to say anything more. Even if Kaito continued to wait, it looked like he would not get any answer.

Kaito silently turned around but before he left, Elisabeth murmured softly:

"I have a question for you. Why did you not poison me secretly?"

"Hmm?"

"After the incident of The Earl, you developed an intense hatred for demons. Yet you are allowing the birth of an even more powerful demon, are you fine with that? Krulus must have told you too."

Elisabeth turned her face towards him. Reflecting moonlight, her red eyes started straight at Kaito.

How should I answer...? Kaito began to think. He never expected Elisabeth herself to ask this kind of question. After a moment's thought, he gave the answer without pretense.

"Someone high up in the Church apparently made a judgment call. Also, I don't think someone like you would contract with a demon."

"Oh?"

"You will be forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth—to die in solitude, right?"

"Yes, indeed. I shall die, as lonely as a wolf and as pitifully as a sow, to die in solitude."

"Surely you cannot tolerate a demon by your side, right?"

Kaito said firmly. By the time this girl died, the demons would most likely be no more.

She tortured her innocent subjects, piling up the corpses into mountains of flesh and blood, and was going to be executed.

This death scene was decided by herself, lonely and sad.

Elisabeth grinned and her shoulders shook as she laughed in delight. Kaito nodded at her and started walking. After entering the

corridor, he turned his gaze to the high window where moonlight was streaming in.

Taking care not to look at the disgusting patterns projected on the floor, he whispered:

"...Eleven left, huh?"

With a fully determined look, Kaito clenched his fist.

The next morning, he slipped out the castle with Hina's help and made his way alone to the Church.

\* \* \*

Passing through a gate that was supposed to lead to the Church headquarters, Kaito found himself surrounded by a wall of red that proceeded to fall as a rain of blood. After the red color dissipated, he was in a dark room on bare ground. Kaito widened his eyes in surprise. This place was the small room connected to the Church's secret passage.

He looked around in puzzlement. The one person he did not want to see was standing right in front of him.

"Hello, looking for the Church to seek asylum?"

Krulus smiled calmly. Behind him were hooded followers dressed in cylindrical robes of pure white.

Leading a bunch of guys dressed in white like that, Krulus seemed like an executioner with a corpse disposal team.

Gazing disdainfully at Kaito like looking at a bug, he spoke in disappointed tone of voice:

"My apologies. It would be very troublesome if the higher-ups were to find out about my private transaction with you, hence if you refuse, my only regrettable choice would be to secretly dispose of you. Nevertheless, relax, since you will not accept the deal, then ultimately this is merely a matter of sooner or later."

His followers grabbed Kaito by the arms and forced him to stand. At the same time, an intense pain radiated from his belly, forcing him to groan. Seeing Kaito like that, Krulus said in surprise:

"Oh dear, it would be troublesome if you cried out like that. Towards the end, you will probably scream until you wreck your throat. Oh dear, but a wrecked throat is no skin off my nose, personally."

At Krulus' orders, Kaito was dragged away. Looking at the passage, Kaito realized he was being dragged to the inquisition room instead of Krulus' private room. There was apparently no need to be civil with Kaito anymore.

Smiling radiantly, Krulus grabbed the inquisition room's door handle.

"Welcome, great sinner. You will be welcomed here then rejected."

The door opened, sounding like the gates of hell.

Kaito was moved inside an enclosure within metal bars. Amid painful groans, Kaito was helplessly secured to a wooden table in the middle. To prevent him from escaping, his arms and legs were shackled.

(...Special seating huh.)

Kaito thought to himself sarcastically. Now that he was on the side of being tortured, he realized there was a drawing of the female martyr on the ceiling. While crying tears of red, she looked down at the tortured people from behind her veil. Kaito suddenly thought, what was she mourning? He did not know the Church's dogma, but felt that the scene she was looking down upon was not what she desired.

God and revered individuals were not supposed to desire this kind of hell. Even as someone not from this world, Kaito believed this should be the case.

"As I have told you last time, cases of summoning from another world are extremely rare. Hence, we will dissect your body and analyze the composition of Elisabeth's summoning spell from the magical power. This will be very beneficial for us to summon those with useful information. Your death will not be completely worthless, so no need to lament. Instead, this will be much better than being executed as Elisabeth's servant. You shall benefit

mankind, thereby atoning for your deep sin. Ah, what joy, what joy."

Krulus looked down at Kaito with a salivating look. His eyes glowing radiantly, no longer the cold gaze as though looking at a bug, affirming Kaito's value. Apparently from Krulus' perspective, the pieces of flesh from dissection were much more useful than a living Kaito.

One of his subordinate took a sharp knife while one guy on the right picked up a pair of bone-cutting shears and a guy on the left took a jigsaw, all of them approaching Kaito. Kaito honestly felt afraid and wanted to scream right away.

With such dry thoughts, Kaito spoke:

"By 'we,' are you referring to you and your contracted demon?"

Krulus' smiled instantly froze. Kaito merely thought "as expected." Someone like Krulus were not used to handling sudden attacks. In his previous life, one of his father's blackmail targets was a certain company president who cooked the books, and he often made this kind of expression.

Kaito sighed deeply and said:

"Actually, I was planning to find you even though the magic circle was connected to the Church's main entrance. Your interference actually saved me a lot of work. How could I possibly run away... This kind of hell is not something to leave alone no matter what."

Kaito turned his neck slightly and looked across the iron bars. The surroundings had turned into a true hell. On a nearby table, a man was groaning nonstop with his gut exposed, the flesh of his abdomen sliced off. Over there, a mother and son were coughing blood nonstop, their bodies compressed into one by thick ropes.

Kaito did not have a strong sense of justice. Originally, he had no spirit of altruism at all. However, toleration had limits and faced with such disgusting acts of cruelty, how could he possibly stand back and let things be?

"After seeing this hell, I began to suspect you. Demons derive power from human suffering, from tormenting the soul. The scene of your inquisitions gave a very similar impression as what demons do... Besides, the point of an inquisition is to make someone confess they are a heretic, but this doesn't seem to be the point no matter how I look at it."

The surrounding people were all on the brink of death, suffering in endless pain and torment.

Atrocious situations beyond human imagination was being used on heretics. This was evidently the ways of the demons.

"With rivets driven all over the body, sliced up into pieces, flesh removed from the belly, how are they still alive? Forget about appropriate treatment, these people are mostly left unattended. When you showed me this room, I subconsciously burned all the images into my eyes, but when I thought about it later, I concluded it was just as I suspected. What maintains their lives by force is a demon's power... And this definitely cannot be condoned by the Church."

He had not seen any other clergy in Krulus' secret underground passage.

If this was torture condoned by the Church, the same thing would be taking place in other places. Then there should be more people coming and going to handle blood and transporting heretics. But in this secret passage, there was no one apart from Krulus and his followers. Kaito had not seen anyone else from the Church.

Krulus had insisted on hiding Kaito's existence without letting him meet other clergy.

This also meant that what he was doing was against the will of the Church.

"Also, it's quite fishy that you came up with your own decision to kill Elisabeth. The only reason the Church would employ her is presumably because they can't find any other solution, backed into a hopeless corner... Otherwise, why would they 'hire a sow to take care of pigs'? However, as a member of the Church, you came secretly to the castle and even asked me to kill her. To prevent an even stronger demon from being born—This sounds kind of legitimate at first but how are you guys planning on dealing with the remaining demons after she's gone? Of the thirteen, only two have been killed so far, and yet you're going to kill the outstanding hunting hound this soon? There is only one reason for this, and that's because you're one of the thirteen demons—"

If a contractor could be found among the kingdom's knights, then a contractor in the Church was not surprising either. Given his position, it was perfect to torment heretics and gather their suffering. Furthermore, he could use the convenience of his duties

to take care of powerful enemies. However, he had been too impatient and his plan was too crude.

Precisely because he looked down at humans from far above, without deigning to hide anything, this current situation resulted.

Kaito, whom he viewed as a bug, looked at him and scoffed.

"Am I right, Krulus? Well, I only realized this possibility thanks to Hina helping my mind to calm down."

"Mr. Puppet that has not died completely, is this all you have to say?"

Krulus smiled calmly, neither offering confirmation nor denial, but Kaito did not miss the vein popping slightly on his forehead.

If Kaito were not tied down completely, he would probably shrug but that was not possible in his current state, so all he could do was nod.

"Yeah, that's all. I've discovered the demon and set the trap. Next is Torturchen's turn to enter the stage."

"The teleportation circle has already been shut down from this side, you fool! You are completely helpless!"

Krulus roared with laughter. Finding this guy hopelessly stupid, Kaito glared at him coldly. Kaito had already seen Krulus interfering with the magic circle beforehand, so of course he predicted that.

Kaito took a deep breath then called out.

Ahhh, this abdominal pain.

*"There is still a magic circle here, capable of letting one person pass through."*

Krulus made a look of surprise, In the next instant, he widened his eyes and ripped Kaito's clothing.

Wrapped around Kaito's belly were leather straps. On the surface of the top-quality leather, a red teleportation circle appeared. Krulus frantically severed the leather with the bone-cutting shears, but gasped when he saw the source of the magic circle.

"...Damn you."

"What a convenient body. I don't die even after bleeding so much."

A magic circle had been carved on Kaito's belly. Fresh blood was spurting out from the deep wounds in the flesh. With every breath, Kaito felt intense pain from his abdomen. Back then when Krulus' followers were dragging him, Kaito even thought he was going to die, but enduring this pain had definitely earned results.

'As my servant, you are also capable of using your own blood to summon certain things to your side.'

This was something Elisabeth had told Kaito in the past. Using the shears, Krulus tried to gouge out Kaito's wounds. But before he

could do that, the teleportation circle glowed brightly. Blood-red petals danced in the air while darkness began to swirl. Krulus widened his eyes in surprise, backing away while he yelled:

"Stay away... Stay away, Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

"How could I not come when summoned with such fervor?"

With the sound of a mocking voice, the darkness suddenly erupted. The red petals swept through the dungeon in a mad dance. The petals turned into droplets in the air, falling down from the ceiling as red rain.

All covered in blood, Elisabeth emerged from the teleportation circle. Her long sleek black hair and skirt hem fluttered. Her elegantly shaped breasts wobbled. Elisabeth casually landed on Kaito's wounds.

Ignoring Kaito's screams, she made a gorgeous smile and snapped her fingers.

"Let us keep it simple for small fry. Death by Hanging."

Ropes descended from the ceiling, wrapping around the necks of Krulus' followers. Looking like a prank, these followers were all suspended from the ceiling. With a snapping sound, their neck

bones were broken, their windpipes crushed, their blood vessels severed. The white hoods covering their faces fell from their heads.

What came to light were not human faces but those of devotees, formed from bloated pus-filled tumors.

Several hanged corpses were suspended helplessly in the room.

"No way... Bastard, bastard!"

Krulus took out his necklace from his collar with trembling hands. He was just about to mutter something when a chain entangled his wrist. His stunned gaze turned to Elisabeth who was smiling.

"You like pain, don't you!?"

Pulled by the chain that was attached to shackles, Krulus' wrist was violently broken. Bones popped out from the flesh while he screamed and struggled. However, he suddenly slid his arm out from the shackles.

Spontaneously, his entire body became covered with poison, his blond hair gradually fell off, his cassock was blown away. His body continued to expand, finally turning into a flesh-colored meat frog. Then he jumped high, deforming the iron bars in the dungeon, escaping to the underground passage.

Seeing that ugly and massive form, Elisabeth showed surprise for some reason.

"That guy... Although his magical power is unnaturally great, he is no demon! He is nothing more than just a pawn, a devotee!"

"R-Really? Then all's fine if we just need to defeat him, right?"

"All's fine, my foot, you imbecile! He is a member of the Church! This is no joke... Speaking of the only demon that the clergy could come into contact with, that would be..."

Elisabeth snapped her fingers, instantly blowing away the restraints on Kaito's arms and legs. Red petals gathered at his wounds, forcing Elisabeth's blood into his body by force. Immediately, his wounds were covered up by new leather straps. The forced transfusion and blood stopping brought horrific pain, making Kaito scream.

"Dahhh, what are you doing to me!? This is too painful, okay!?"

"Follow me if you wish, I care not even if you stay behind. If I fail to return in time, or end up taking a different route back to the castle, you will have to figure out on your own how to heal yourself and extend your life!"

"You're giving me no choice but to follow you!"

Kaito forced himself to stand up and began to run after Elisabeth. Having recovered some of his blood loss, he should be able to keep up, just barely, as long as he ignored the pain.

Leaving through the door, the meat frog fled along the underground passage in panic. Elisabeth waved her hand at the frog, producing a vortex of darkness and petals that turned into a giant spiked wheel that started rolling towards him. However, the wheel was deflected by something along the way and vanished.

For merely a brief instant, Kaito felt like he saw a shadow resembling a black dog's tail behind the meat frog.

The meat frog glanced behind itself, made look of relief, then sped up further.

"That response... Could it be real!?"

Elisabeth shouted anxiously, completely unlike her usual style. Against a devotee, she even pulled out the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl.

The meat frog quickly ascended a relatively wide staircase and broke through the door. In the middle of transporting scrolls, a staid middle-aged member of the clergy screamed and fell on his bottom. A young member of the clergy was apparently taking believers on a tour inside the Church. Seeing the situation, he stepped forward to shield the believers behind him. The normal Church seemed to be a more wholesome organization than what Kaito had expected.

The meat frog was moving along a corridor paved with marble and kept quite clean and tidy. Spreading bubbling poison fluid along the way, the meat frog charged forward. Elisabeth dashed into the chapel and swung her sword at the meat frog.

"Gibbet!"

Darkness swirled in a narrow vortex, producing a cramped cage that barely allowed a person to be stuffed inside in an upside down posture. The meat frog was squeezed into it, forcing out a great deal of poison fluid from it. Furthermore, the cage had chains wrapping tightly around it. With this setup, the meat frog would remain bound by the chains even if it broke the cage. But in the next instant, Elisabeth shuddered violently and fell on her knees.

"Guh... Mm, ah... My body..."

The cage broke apart, turning into darkness and petals. The chains also lost tension, gradually disappearing while falling to the ground.

"Elisabeth!"

Red letters appeared over her body. Kaito's golem functionality attempted to translate the words, but ultimately failed. His knowledge told him that it was language from God, impossible to translate or pronounce.

The scripture of God was imprinted all over Elisabeth like burns. These words seemed as though fire was being poured into the shackles under her skin.

These were probably the restraints the Church had imposed on her. However, why did this mechanism suddenly activate?

"It burns... Guh... Nn-nn, ah, why... who... who is it?"

Elisabeth crawled on the ground, glaring angrily to the side. The priest at the altar was holding a necklace up high, trembling while reciting a prayer. With every sentence he spoke, the words carved on Elisabeth's skin would glow red. Elisabeth unleashed a bloody roar:

"Preposterous! I am not the one who needs to be controlled! It is that one over there, imbecile!"

The meat frog knocked down many worshipers, smashing seating along the way, charging deeper into the Church.

A group of guards finally gathered but were smashed into disarray. Flattened by the meat frog's massive belly, their bones were crushed

under their armor. However, the confused priest continued to recite his prayer.

Kaito rushed up the few steps and reached out towards him without warning.

"Y-You..."

"Old man, give me that!"

Kaito pulled off the necklace from the priest's wrinkled neck and tossed it away.

Elisabeth then stood up and dashed like an arrow. However, severe burns remained on her body.

Kaito went on the move too, following after Elisabeth who had suffered much from the scripture.

Scattered along the corridor were collapsed guards that had been crushed to death. The farther they went, the more corpses there were. The majestic door they had been guarding securely was now wide open.

Inside was a grand office. Seated on a velvet chair was an old man dressed in vestments with gold thread and a diadem on his head. His entire lower body was crushed and he was already dead.

The wall behind him was wide open with a secret passage revealed.

The interior of the secret passage was carved with God's scripture, glowing faintly. With every step the meat frog took in the secret passage, its surface would froth and burnt flesh would fall off. However, the same phenomenon was happening to Elisabeth too.

As soon as Elisabeth rushed into the passage, the scripture glowed again, tormenting her.

"Guh... Ah, ahhhhhhhhh, ah, ah, aa."

"Elisabeth! You idiot, don't be so reckless!"

Kaito frantically caught Elisabeth by the shoulder and walked, enduring the pain on his abdomen. The meat frog barely made it to the end of the passage alive, then pressing itself against the wall, it spoke with a torrent of tears:

"Your Majesty, I was wrong. To think I dared to imprison you all this time, intending to one-sidedly obtain your power. Maintaining my faith while exploiting you, what a presumptuous notion. I now offer everything of mine to you, exalted one, to liberate you as proof of my loyalty. I implore you to deliver me from that demonic woman."

The meat frog spat something out. From the mass of mucus, it took out a golden key.

The frog touched the words of God appearing on the wall in a complicated sequence then recited a prayer while inserting the key into the wall that lacked keyholes. With a click, the wall glowed intensely then vanished.

Out flowed concentrated darkness and bone-piercing cold air. In the center of the viscous darkness was an interrogation chair.

On that chair sat a raven-haired man.

The man slowly lifted his face, his black and tousled hair shaking, his red eyes flashing brightly. The face visible under the hair exhibited androgynous beauty. However, the instant Kaito laid eyes on him, he felt a kind of pressure as though he was being choked. At the same time, he came to understood something.

This was something extremely terrifying. Despite a beautiful human shape, it was definitely something completely different from a human, something fearsome.

And for some reason, that face seemed familiar to Kaito.

The leather straps restraining the man's limbs suddenly burned silently and fell off. The man stood up slowly as though rising from a throne. From his back, clad in a prisoner's uniform, thick spikes were pulled out with a gush of fresh blood. However, there was no change in the man's expression at all.

As though in a dream, his eyes continued to stare into space.

The meat frog—Krulus—crawled to the man's feet and knelt down in a disgraceful manner, desperately making eyes at the man in hopes of mercy. However, the man lifted one foot without even looking at the frog, then buried that bare foot directly into its brain. The meat frog's giant eyeballs fell out from the impact.

"Gubeh."

Squish... A scattering of red-black blood. The meat frog's head was easily crushed underfoot. Gray brain matter oozed everywhere but standing in the pool of blood, the man made no reaction, almost as though he was unaware that he had trampled a frog by the side of a road. Then the man looked up in a daze.

At that moment, the man finally turned his gaze to Elisabeth who was standing at the entrance.

His sluggish expression suddenly changed to reveal a sweet smile of rapture.

"Elisabeth."

The voice was filled with fervent love, completely identical to the voice Kaito had heard in the treasure vault at the castle.

"Vlaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaad!"

Elisabeth roared, swatting Kaito away with a wave of her hand. Kaito crashed loudly into the wall.

Elisabeth charged into the room, swinging the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl. The sword tore through the air while hundreds of chains rushed at the man, but with her entire body scorched by scripture, the chains released by Elisabeth were far weaker than

usual. Even so, an attack capable of pulverizing The Knight was entirely blocked by a black dog tail sweeping through the air.



Growwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwl,  
growwwwwwwwwwwwwwl, growwwwwwwwwwl.

Spontaneously, a giant black dog had appeared, crouching next to the man. Exhibiting a sleek coat of fur and fit muscles, it was a hunting hound of the best pedigree.

The black dog exuded a strong beastly scent, with hellfire burning in its eyes and mouth. Although its appearance was not ugly, Kaito's instincts told him that this was the most dangerous being out of all demons encountered so far. Even so, he did not know why he did not feel the slightest fear. Perhaps his mind has numbed in a rare moment.

Faced with this manifestation of *death*, his feelings of fear had been utterly paralyzed.

Compared to those demons with ugly appearances, this one was on a completely different level.

The black dog silently poked its head forward, its sharp teeth could be considered beautiful. With perfect motions, it approached Elisabeth, but just before it was about to crush Elisabeth's delicate body in its jaws, the man shook his head. The black dog stopped. Still with a rapturous expression on his face, the man disappeared.

At the same time, the terrifying pressure dominating the room also vanished. Kaito witnessed everything from the secret passage. Finally reaching the room, he swept his gaze across his surroundings in a daze.

"W-Where did that thing go? More importantly, what on earth is it..."

"The Emperor."

"Huh?"

Elisabeth replied to Kaito's question in a stiff voice. Kaito tilted his head.

She supplemented her answer for the puzzled Kaito:

"The Emperor has returned to his homeland."

At that moment, Kaito finally figured out the man's true identity and the worst-case scenario at hand.

Previously captured by the Church, the highest ranked demon out of the fourteen—The Emperor—was now unleashed upon the world.

# 5 捷問姫の故郷

## Chapter 5 - Torturchen's Homeland

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At the throne room, Elisabeth had her legs crossed arrogantly.

Sitting on the throne, she was facing the sky that was filled with dark clouds. Hovering in front of her was an orb glowing blue-white. Kaito did not ask what specifically was going on. The slowly spinning orb was showing an image of some big shot faraway. However, the face, which was always shown from the front, seemed fuzzy as though behind a curtain of mist, making it impossible to even distinguish the facial features.

The mysterious character spoke in a deep voice lacking in human compassion.

"Due to considerations from discussions about whether or not to transfer The Emperor to the royal capital, he was not sealed in a completely secure manner. Furthermore, Krulus was a master of cultivating relationships and managed to obtain leaked information from higher officials regarding the secret location where The Emperor was held as well as lock opening method. In addition, most of the high priests including me had gone to the royal capital for ceremonial rites, thus weakening security at the Church headquarters... This current situation arose from the stacking of many unfortunate and unforeseen factors."

"What a great joke. Simply stated, humans are to blame. Cut the formalities and get to the chase."

"The Church is officially tasking you, Elisabeth Le Fanu, to exterminate or capture The Emperor."

Elisabeth scoffed at the orb's answer and haughtily crossed her legs the other way, grinning sardonically.

"Ordering me to wipe your ass again? You people never change. Your God remains sitting on the throne without the slightest movement, never saving you. And what saves you is the power and authority you flaunt arbitrarily. You people whip the dog that is leashed in the name of God while sitting on your high horse."

"We do not possess the military strength to oppose those beings, which is why we have no choice but to employ you. However, this does not negate the truth of *God* being with us at all times. Although God tests us with trials and tribulations, God's blessings are with us as children of God."

"Cut the nonsense! You conman! According to your dogma, those men who contracted with demons, turning into misshapen forms, and I, Torturchen, are all created by God. Yet when has God's blessing been with us? I cannot believe how you can cling to these words despite the obvious contradictions!"

"May God's blessing continue to be with you. God is merciful and you will know that God is by your side if you open your heart to experience carefully. Shedding tears of blood on your behalf, God will surely grant you redemption through punishment. I have known you since you were young, Elisabeth, daughter of my ally, the head of the Le Fanu family... You are supposed to hate the demons."

Elisabeth's eyebrow twitched as she pursed her lips with displeasure. Kaito peered timidly from the side at her face. However, he hastily righted his posture when Elisabeth glared at him.

Unconcerned by Elisabeth's silence, the orb of light continued indifferently.

"Do not forget the inscription we engraved on your sword. 'Earn your freedom through action. Pray for God to become your savior. The beginning, the process, the end, everything is in God's hands.' The Church has also imposed multiple restraints on The Emperor and we have activated all of them today. They will expire after the seventh day. Kindly punish him during this time."

The glowing orb issued a deadline in an unchanging tone of voice. His tone did not sound like a threat, but precisely because of that, Kaito felt bone-chilling terror. By Elisabeth's side, he began to think.

(Seven days, is it possible to take care of The Emperor during this period? If not, what would be the outcome?)

When the time came, what kind of calamity would befall mankind?

The other side did not elaborate. As though adding a final stab, he finished with a command.

"Do a little good before you die."

The orb stopped glowing and fell to the floor with a clunk. Kaito picked it up, only to see that it was made of thin paper. He had no idea at all which part of it was giving off light just now.

Looking up in confusion, Kaito asked Elisabeth:

"Hey, just now that was..."

"A meeting initiated by Godot Dios, one of the Church's top officials. That old fart is still annoying as ever."

Elisabeth shook her head and say no more. Watching the side of her face while she stared off into space, Kaito asked the question that bothered him the most.

"Hey, do you have an idea where The Emperor went?"

"Yes."

Elisabeth instantly replied. Kaito breathed a sigh of relief for now. Whether The Emperor's whereabouts were known would greatly affect the difficulty of the mission.

Elisabeth narrowed her red eyes at the wall's collapsed hole as though staring out into the distance. Over there were endless gray clouds glinting darkly, shrouding the sky over the pitch-black and rustling forest.

"The Emperor has returned. Returned to my castle and homeland."

Why had The Emperor returned to Elisabeth's homeland?

Why did The Emperor call out to Elisabeth with affection?

Kaito waited for a continuation but Elisabeth stopped talking, so he did not pry. The two of them stood there without moving, staring at the hole in the wall.

After a long silence, the wind brought in the smell of rain from outside. Soon after, Elisabeth took a deep breath and exhaled. She clicked her tongue and suddenly stood up forcefully as though intending to knock her chair over.

"— — — Time to set off."

"— — — — Oh."

Kaito nodded in response to her words that were infused with subdued anger.

In the next instant, Elisabeth floored Kaito with a sharp kick, saying "Is this the proper attitude of a servant?"

\* \* \*

Elisabeth's homeland was on the other side of a tall wall.

It was said that the great noble house of Le Fanu used to own vast territories. This rural town was a special place. The bloody legend of Torturchen began none other than here.

With the Le Fanu family's spired castle of chalk in the center, the town had its back to a steep mountain while its front was spread in a fan shape. Using the mountainous terrain, the town was surrounded by walls equipped with phantasmal beast summoning platforms, allowing solid defense during times of war. But currently, the walls were being used for a completely different purpose.

With the gate tightly shut, the walls had sealed the town securely. Take one step beyond the wall and one would arrive in a realm of death.

The tall walls currently stood tantamount to a gigantic tombstone for this little town.

It was said that "Torturchen" Elisabeth Le Fanu had shut the gate and set up instruments of torture and execution on the streets to subject every last one of the town's residents to torture. The massacre had lasted three days and three nights during which the screams of pain were like a grand musical piece, playing throughout the town the whole time.

With the slaughter at this town as a starting point, she proceeded to create the Field of Impalement, the Death Ball at the Mountain Village, accumulating every greater piles of corpses.

(...The more I learn, the worse the details coming to light.)

All this was information told to Kaito by Elisabeth herself.

Kaito wanted to understand their next destination, so Elisabeth tossed him a copy of *The Records of Torturchen* compiled by the Church. After learning this series of legends, Kaito was shocked. Then she scoffed lightly at him.

"Who do you take me for? I am 'Torturchen' Elisabeth Le Fanu."

"Even though I am currently hunting demons, I am also a great sinner with few equals in this world, and by no means a saint all the way to the bitter end."

Currently, Kaito, Elisabeth and Hina were standing at the place where the tragic legend began.

In front of them was a scorched and blackened wasteland.

After the massacre, the great number of corpses in the streets were difficult to dispose of, so in the end, a fire was set inside the walls to incinerate everything. The fire burned for seven days and seven nights. After the fire, the town was sealed off as-si without recovering the dead bodies inside.

"What a terrible sight."

"Well, borrowing the Church's description, this is 'the land forsaken by God.'"

Elisabeth murmured as though it did not concern her and Kaito nodded slightly.

This description was no exaggeration. Massive areas of housing had been burnt down. Between piles of rubble remained torture devices and countless bones, reminiscent of religious paintings of scenes from hell. Against a backdrop of brick houses whose roofs had been burnt down, innumerable skeletons were skewered on iron stakes as though they were offerings to demons.

Amidst all this, the castle of chalk was the only structure standing there in beauty, neither decayed nor scorched black.

It was like a toy castle that had been placed after the fact onto a ground covered by ash and dirt.

The one responsible for creating this surreal scene—Elisabeth—clicked her tongue.

"Tsk, even I find this atmosphere annoying. Both of you better be careful. The Emperor has returned and I am unsure what awaits us. However, it is definitely nothing good."

"Understood. I shall stay in combat mode. Lord Kaito, please stay behind me to avoid injury."

"Oh, thanks."

Kaito nodded and went behind Hina obediently. Hina smiled tenderly, bowed and murmured gently:

"Please rest assured. I will protect you at all costs."

Currently, she was wielding a massive halberd.

Tracing out a vicious outline, this weapons was far longer than her height. Its tip, the spear portion, was exceptionally stout while the ax part was a thick and hooked blade. That thing must weigh a lot, yet Hina was holding it like carrying a teapot, quite at ease even when walking with it.

The scene before his eyes was like a joke or perhaps a nightmare. Starting from a while ago, Kaito had felt dizzy. Just as Elisabeth had said, the atmosphere here was quite terrible. There was an unpleasant warmth in the air, as though past flames were still burning underground. The corpses should have rotted or turned to ash, yet it still felt like a pungent stench of decay was brushing against their noses. Like flesh, human regrets and feelings had decayed, turning into mud, piled up in this place. This was Kaito's most direct impression.

Furthermore, the clear blood lust and hatred exuding from the mud were all focused on one target.

Contemptible Elisabeth, terrifying Elisabeth, ugly and cruel Elisabeth!

Be cursed, be cursed, be cursed, forever be cursed, Elisabeth!

The entire town was roaring in silent voices, but Kaito had no way of telling if it was a hallucination.

No matter what, this was a town of death, Elisabeth's homeland, the birthplace of Torturchen. However, Elisabeth herself completely ignored the pressure from all directions, walking forward openly.

(What exactly... are you thinking?)

Kaito had no clue what was going through her mind. However, how should he go about asking her? But he did not know at all if it was necessary to ask. And the pressing issue at hand was to take care of The Emperor.

Following Elisabeth, he walked along the road that was covered by a thick mixture of ash and mud.

Along the entire street, signs of slaughter could be seen everywhere. Skeletons were buried in the ground in a row like vegetables in a field. On the branches of a burnt tree, three human skeletons were hanging with bones of dogs by metal wire. This was probably a setup where the sharp claws of randomly struggling animals would add to the victims' pain.

Such malice. Kaito frowned. Suddenly, one of the skeletons slowly looked up.

"...Huh?"

"Hmm? What is the matter, Kaito?"

"Uh, umm..."

The skeleton slowly moved, turning its hollow eye sockets towards Elisabeth. Kaito rubbed his eyes but no matter how many times he checked, the skeleton whose head should be down was still staring in their direction. At that moment...

From the incinerated wasteland, dry sounds were heard endlessly. At the same time, a huge number of skeletons jumped into the center of the road. Some were impaled by spears from their mouths to their bottoms with spikes all over their backs. Some had all their limbs amputated. Despite their pitiful state, they were dancing in apparent joy.

Confronted with bones that stood as evidence of brutal torture, Kaito gulped. Seeing Kaito halt in his tracks, one of the skeletons approached, reaching out with a hand where half the fingers were gone, like grasping for a lifesaving straw. Kaito felt an urge to hold the hand, but at the same time, the bones brought a sharp broken wrist in a backhanded swing. Instantly, the skeleton collapsed entirely with a whack.

Unsure what happened, Kaito frantically looked to the side. Hina was frozen in a pose after the swing of her halberd, her emerald eyes widened to a scary degree, murmuring to herself:

"—Touching Lord Kaito is forbidden, you accursed scum."

"Ah, okay."

Kaito hastily dodged behind Hina again. The skeletons kept coming one after another but their primary target, Elisabeth, did not even bother to glance at them.

"What a hassle."

While stretching her back, she walked with audible footsteps and continued. With every contact of her heel against the ground, darkness and red petals popped out from the road surface and exploded into iron stakes. However, even when nailed to the ground, the skeletons would disassemble and reassemble their bones to approach again. Even with Hina swinging her halberd and Elisabeth eliminating them, the tide was undead was endless.

Kaito felt a chilled to the bottom of his heart. To think that Elisabeth had killed this many people.

As though participating in a parade, new skeletons kept charging, prompting Elisabeth to click her tongue.

"How much will this weak attack continuing? Huh? Mere skeletons will never kill me, not even if they spent a century going at it. Why not show yourself sooner? If you lack other means, stop hogging the stage."

Even with the skeletons hindering them, Kaito's trio was still advancing east uphill, reaching a main road connected to the castle.

Probably to facilitate the coming and going of horse-drawn carriages, the gently sloping path was paved with tiles and made quite wide. The left and right edges had remains of melted metal signs as the frames of what used to be magnificent houses. The roofs of surviving single-story buildings were covered with dust and ash, probably a row of shops in the past. Even now, with the entire town in utter decay, memories of past prosperity lingered on this main street. However, a terrifying silhouette was currently standing at what appeared to be a residential neighborhood.

A tall woman, dressing in funeral attire, was standing there as though mourning the vast number of deceased.

Her face was obscured by black lace. Her sleek black hair draped down on her back while she stood there silently. She was wearing silk gloves and a long dress whose collar completely covered up her throat. The color black was uniform from head to toe. Covered up like those adhering to imposed propriety, her body was exceptionally skinny except for the massive bust, resulting in an unbelievable air of allure. The wide sun hat was decorated with many fragrant-looking lilies on top.

These lonely flowers, like those presented at graveyards, were the only source of color and brightness on her pure black getup.

Elisabeth halted and asked with displeasure:

"Suspicious woman over there, dressed in black, are you the necromancer conducting this annoying attack?"

"—It seems that you do not hold back at all, even against the people you toyed with, violated, and killed in the past."

Her voice was quite deep for a woman but strangely gentle. Elisabeth frowned and narrowed her red eyes as though she was searching her memories.

Kaito was behind her and puzzled too. Elisabeth rarely showed any expression to enemies apart from anger or annoyance. In a distinct babbling tone of voice, she continued:

"Showing no interest in the bones after consuming the flesh... Is that what you mean?"

"Oh, certainly, however... Your voice and manner of speaking, could it be that..."

The woman did not reply to Elisabeth's question. She lifted up her skirt hem from the mound of ash, raising it up to the base of her thigh. Her skin under the skirt was exposed, to a dangerous height that invited doubt as to whether she was wearing underwear. Then she shook her skirt hem, resulting in human bones falling out.

With a clatter, the bones assembled into their original shape. Like giving a cat affection, the woman stroked the skulls of the crawling skeletons. Seeing the finished skeletons, Kaito was rendered speechless.

Twisted limbs and spines arched backwards in a bridge posture, crawling on the road. It was impossible to walk around in this manner unless the body had been restricted in such a state for long periods of time.

These small skeletons were all children.

Crawling on the ground, the skeletons pounced at Elisabeth. What sounded like screams leaked out from between their teeth, but Elisabeth mercilessly kicked without hesitation.

"No end to this!"

The tip of her heel smashed the child's chest, causing the skeleton to collapse just like that. Due to the wind from that powerful kick, the woman's hat was blown to the ground. The face hidden under the black veil was revealed.

She possessed full lips, slender eyes and a beauty mark at the corner of her eye. A beautiful woman who gave off a modest impression.

She smiled and said:

"I apologize for not being in touch for so long, Lady Elisabeth."

Her blue-gray eyes moistened while she bowed her head deeply. She looked up and picked up her hat, patting away the dirt before putting it on her head, this time in a manner showing her face. She narrowed her eyes nostalgically with a smile on her lips.

"My lady, you have not changed the slightest. I have advised you many times in the past to change that impatient character of yours."

"Wretched woman... Are you Marianne?"

Elisabeth's voice showed faltering. The woman nodded with delight. Faced with Elisabeth's unusual reaction, Kaito asked:

"Marianne?"

"She used to be my governess. Why are you here? Originally, you were merely an ordinary woman, rather mundane, well-educated but average in looks, with a strong obsession about cleanliness, remaining as a spinster, am I not correct? Why did you become a necromancer?"

"My lady, do you truly not know? After witnessing such cruel scenes, do you honestly believe I could continue my life as an ordinary woman?"

The woman—Marianne—answered in a singing voice while her hands, clad in gloves of black lace, began to move.

With every motion of her slender fingers, the bones scattered on the stone tiles would bounce up one after another like marionettes. While Marianne having the skeletons enact a ridiculous dance, she continued:

"Logically speaking, when the notorious Torturchen allowed me to live, I ought to have fled this town to the remote countryside to live out my life quietly. However, I could not do that. Having educated you... That willful and adorable little lady, but supposed to be quite righteous in the fiber of your being, to think you would take out tools of torture and execution with delight, to start a mad massacre that would create hell on earth. Confronted with such scenes, I honestly felt..."

Marianne lifted her face and directed a gaze of compassion as though looking at someone pitiful.

"I was wrong, it was my fault. Had I performed my duties properly as your governess, to educate and guide you correctly, you would not have strayed into such a misguided path after the death of your parents. All this is my responsibility. I am to blame for failing to save you, my lady."

"Cut the nonsense. How could you possibly be responsible? Do not get too full of yourself. Ever since my childhood, your education had failed to affect me in any way, so there existed no possibility of you changing my cruel nature. Regardless what you did, it would

have been akin to wind against my ear, leaving nothing permanent. Futility at its best."

Elisabeth raised her black fingernails with a whoosh.

(Is she summoning another instrument of torture?)

Kaito held his breath but instead of summoning anything, Elisabeth simply pointed into the distance.

"Be gone. I have no idea why you chose now to appear before me, but do not let me see you again. During my childhood days, I was confined indoors for long periods of time and you looked after me plenty. This time, I shall let you go, but never again. Hurry and get lost somewhere far away from me. Find a place to die in peace and quiet."

(Is she letting an enemy that attacked her go?)

Kaito felt surprised again while recalling the image of Elisabeth in childhood that he had witnessed some time ago. Next to that extremely emaciated girl was a slightly neurotic but very gentle woman.

A willful young lady and her governess... Their appearance was a surprisingly perfect match for this relationship.

Precisely because such a scene had occurred in the past, Elisabeth was showing mercy to her now, but Marianne did not look like she would listen to Elisabeth.

With her hands clasped firmly before her chest, she tightened her fingers so much that the flesh was squeezed, making the bones visible.

"It was my fault... I was the one who allowed you to become so twisted. That is why I..."

"Enough, Marianne! Listen to others!"

"...my lady, the way you are..."

Marianne's finger bones creaked. As though responding to her turbulent emotions, the bones underfoot jumped violently. These bones abandoned human form to assemble a giant scaffold. The scaffold rattled while falling towards Elisabeth.

Elisabeth simply shrugged. In the next instant, the bones scattered as though there had been an explosion from within.

Out from the scaffold dashed a blood-less horse.

"What!?"

Elisabeth widened her eyes in surprise. Kaito was speechless too. The horse glowing with phosphorescence, the stately armor... This belonged to The Knight who was supposed to be dead. However, this was not the real Knight.

The Knight before their eyes was made from rotten flesh. The flesh horse's chest was dangling, exposing the ribs. From gaps in the armored helmet, juices of decay and maggots kept emerging. Even if it was a resurrection, that body looked far too fragile. Nevertheless, lightning attacked the surroundings with every kick of the hooves against the ground, just like the real thing.

Spurring his horse to charge, The Knight grabbed a lance from the lightning in the air.

"Bone Mill!"

Elisabeth swung a flat hammer featuring many spikes, gouging a large chunk of decomposing flesh from The Knight's body and crushing his bones. The Knight easily collapsed. However, just before he vanished, the lance smashed the ground violently. Although the body composed of rotting flesh was fragile, the offensive strength was not to be underestimated.

"The way you are, my lady, I love you to bits!"

With cheeks flush red, Marianne screamed in joy. Panting heavily, she hugged her own body tightly with her slender arms, looking like she was trying to suppress the excitement in her heart, squeezing her bust under the massive pressure.

Elisabeth's face twitched as she back away forcefully. Kaito also broke out in cold sweat on his back. Before them, Marianne's eyes were flashing brightly.

This woman did not seem mentally sane at all.

Squeezing her chest further, she deformed her bust even more and started to murmur in ecstasy:

"Shoudering heavy sins that are impossible to redeem, my lady, no one will understand you, no one will love you. Cursed and hated by the people, you will ultimately die pitifully... I am probably the only one who can save you despite yourself, the only one willing to save you despite what you are. This is precisely the new mission I have

accepted for failing to stop you in the past. Precisely because of that, I have committed my resolve."

Marianne licked her luscious lips and saliva dripped to her chin.

"I will... personally end your life!"

"The Knight, eh? ...My, what bizarre techniques you have acquired. I know not your objective but presumably, that man must be the one pulling strings, yes? How great a power have you received from The Emperor?"

Ignoring the confession delivered with fervent gaze, Elisabeth asked. Marianne simply responded with a quiet smile.

With the sound similar to percussion instruments, the bones formed a scaffold shape again. Like a burning torch, the center swirled with blue flames in a vortex. In this horrifying scene, like a magic ritual, the bizarre looking Knight was born in flames. Then more scaffolds were set up one after another, producing replicas of The Knight nonstop.

Next, boxes a size smaller than the earlier scaffolds was assembled and meat frogs jumped out from inside. Countless slimy hands and feet slapped the stone tiles of the ground, splattering liquid poison and decay fluid all over the place.

"All for the sake of loooooooooooooove!"

"You... are thoroughly insane."

The strange voice echoed, sounding like it was moistened with love. Elisabeth shook her head as though she had an intolerable headache. Marianne said something and then her face flushed even redder as though in embarrassment, and nodded her head deeply.

Staring at her, Hina cautiously raised her halberd and whispered:

"...Why is this? I want to refute her yet I also feel deeply sympathetic with her."

"Please don't do that, I'm begging you."

"N-No, Lord Kaito, you have misunderstood! What I understand is the heartache felt for a master who has strayed into the wrong path, but proceeding to decide that the master should be killed would be far too arrogant. Even if the master is walking the wrong path, one should support the master to the very end, squeezing out even the last drop of bone marrow and die for the master, that is what a servant's duty entails. Besides, love means self-sacrifice. So long as it is for your sake, Lord Kaito, I will gladly die any time."

"Hina, ahead of you!"

Many meat frogs were jumping about. Their soft and rotten flesh pushing against one another and deforming, pushing their way to approach Kaito and company. Instantly, Hina vanished without a sound. She charged forward and swung her halberd fiercely.

"—Mere decomposing flesh—"

The meat frog at the forefront had its belly ruptured in one hit, splashing rotting meat and liquid poison on the meat frogs in the back. As though dancing, Hina stepped on the frog's corpse and

advanced, her body spinning half a revolution while swinging the halberd, sweeping the surrounding meat frogs.

Then she swung her halberd vigorously again to throw off the poison fluid stuck to the blade and suddenly stopped.

"—Quit bothering—"

She lowered her center of gravity and dashed fiercely. During the instant when she passed by The Knight, she swung her halberd at the horse, bifurcating the horse's body horizontally. The horse's lower half galloped some distance before collapsing on the road just as the top half fell on the stone tiles. The Knight looked around uneasily.

"—my loving conversation with Lord Kaito!"

Hina lopped off The Knight's head, kicking the head flying out of sight the second it fell to the ground.

After doing all this, Hina returned to Kaito as though performing a magnificent dance. Brandishing the halberd rapidly with great dexterity, she sent rotting meat flying into the air. Once all the filth was gone, she readjusted her grip on the halberd and smiled at Kaito.

That smile was as sweet as an angel's.

"Excuse me, let us continue. Only for your sake, Lord Kaito, I have long prepared myself to walk gladly to my death. Even now, I will

not allow anyone to harm a single hair of yours, so please do not worry."

"Th-Thanks. Y-You're such a great help. B-By the way, how's Elisabeth doing on her side?"

Under Hina's intense pressure, Kaito acted a little suspiciously while looking around him.

Elisabeth was facing an endless onslaught of demons reproduced through rotten flesh. However, she remained completely unfazed, even swinging a spiked metal ball in a haphazard storm, piercing the bodies of these demon replicas, tossing them to the ground to produce a huge number of meatballs.

"Marianne, what is the meaning of this?"

"This is one of the thirteen demons defeated by you. Or rather, its devotees. I extracted some of their blood back when they were still alive, then using that blood as a catalyst, I summoned part of their soul to replicate. By manifesting the intense twistedness in their souls through temporary bodies of flesh, this is the result."

"A sudden career change to a necromancer cannot possibly attain such powerful techniques. Sure enough, you have joined Vlad."

"Indeed, I have received plenty of help, sacrificing many people as well. However, all this was for your sake alone, it was unavoidable. For the sake of allowing a weak woman such as I to be able to fight Torturchen, everything was a necessary sacrifice."

After listening to Marianne, Kaito examined those demon replicas again. The materials used probably consisted of human flesh. This town had bones all over the place, but no flesh. Where and how did

Marianne obtain this human flesh? Given the massive quantity required by her spells, just the thought of that was nauseating.

As though praying, Marianne clasped her gloved fingers together.

"Yes, indeed. Unavoidable... Unavoidable, unavoidable unavoidable unavoidable! This was unavoidable! Because, because I wanted to become like you, there was no other way except to shoulder an accumulation of sins just like you!"

Blue flames rushed forth as her voice heightened. The flames burned as though recreating the great fire from the past, producing a huge number of Knights from them.

The Knights charged at Elisabeth while an army of meat frogs swarmed Kaito and Hina.

"Stop exposing your ugly forms endlessly in front of Lord Kaito!"

Hina swung her halberd with precision, even calculating the trajectory of splashing poison, but suddenly, the bones in the surroundings turned into a shield, blocking her attack. Even though the bones were smashed, the meat frogs were spared.

"Hina, are you ok—"

"—Impudent knaves!"

Hina shouted, burying the sole of her boot into the face of a meat frog that had evaded her halberd. The frog's head was crushed and exploded, splashing all around. Hina landed magnificently, the hem of her maid uniform fluttering.

"Thank you for your concern, Lord Kaito. Sure enough, you are so kind... But now..."

The same situation was happening over at Elisabeth's side.

Skeletons were crawling all over her metal ball. Despite their smashed bodies, those skeletons continued to cling tightly to the spikes on the metal ball while digging their feet deep into the ground, forcefully stopping the metal ball, using their numbers to fight a battle of attrition.

"Ahh, my lady, do you feel it? Has regret made your skin tremble? Has chagrin brought stinging pain to your womb? You shall be killed by the remains of the innocent people you slaughtered. Do you feel it? Their intense hatred, blood lust, sorrow, does it sting your skin and burn your flesh!? My lady!"

Clutching her lower abdomen tightly, Marianne called out like an opera singer.

Countless lances had their tips pointed at Elisabeth. Elisabeth impatiently snapped her fingers.

Arms of iron grabbed the lances. Equal numbers of Iron Maidens surrounded The Knights, preparing to drag them into their chests. However, skeletons kept throwing themselves into the open chest cavities, one after another, invading the internals of the Iron Maidens, breaking their gears.

With a storm of tears, as though she were the one being attacked, Marianne cried out:

"My lady, did you know? Your people whom you have killed, they used to have ordinary lives that they wanted to protect? No one deserved to die by your hand, you know? My lady!"

Marianne looked very bizarre. The ecstatic red flush on her face had subsided. Pressing her hand firmly against her chest, she was panting as though she were in pain, shedding tears nonstop.

"Why? Why? My lady, why did you have to perpetrate such cruel acts? Why, why did you not understand!? My ladyyyyyyyyyy!"

"...Her mind... has split huh?"

Kaito could not help but mutter. Marianne's conduct was very unstable. While driven by love in ecstasy, trying to kill Elisabeth, she was also tearfully demanding her to show remorse and contrition.

"My lady, why, why will you not understand...? I have given up on being myself. What you have done will make everyone weep, I must kill you. I must stop you and it must be I who will stop you."

Only now did Kaito realize that Marianne's mind was completely broken. She had been utterly crushed by the hell on earth created by Elisabeth as well as the guilt of failing to prevent Elisabeth's atrocities.

"...my, my, my lady, it was my fault, so..."

What was in front of Kaito and company was nothing more than an ordinary woman who had gone completely mad.

Emitting a sharp cry that resembled a scream, Marianne covered her face. On that hat of hers, the white lilies silently shook. Elisabeth clicked her tongue and said quietly:

".....How tragic, Marianne. This was all done by your hand."

At that moment, Elisabeth's leg was grabbed by a skeleton's hand. She was pulled into a large group of undead all at once. These people whom she had slaughtered cruelly, their rotted bodies brimming with concentrated blood thirst and hatred, and Torturchen was completely submerge in this blood thirst and hatred.

Contemptible Elisabeth, terrifying Elisabeth, ugly and cruel Elisabeth!

Be cursed, be cursed, be cursed, be cursed, forever be cursed, Elisabeth!

Kaito felt like he could hear the dead's pitiful cries, but not to outdone, he shouted loudly:

"Elisabeth! Come out! Elisabeth! Stop screwing around, hey!"

"Lady Elisabeth, Hina shall come assist you!"

Hina cried out too and charged. Before she got there, the skeletons rattled and squirmed as though trying to make Elisabeth savor the pain they had experienced. Marianne shouted again:

"Did you know? Did you know? My lady, my lady!"

"Something like that... I..."

A feeble voice leaked out from the skeletons. Hina hastily halted. At the same time, a voice exploded.

"I knew it... Long  
agooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

Accompanying a thunderous shout, chains extended out like an explosion.

With Elisabeth at the center, countless chains erupted, swirling in a vortex like a hurricane, sweeping away the undead completely mercilessly. Countless skeletons were easily dragged by the chains, producing an endless sound of breaking bones.

The vortex of chains was like the blooming of a gorgeous rose, unfolding all around. The chains swept across the ground, smashing debris, crushing skeletons into fragments, utterly pulverizing all the people whom she had tortured and killed in the past. Noticing the wildly flying chains that were like a multi-headed snake, Hina murmured:

"As expected of Lady Elisabeth, how beautiful. However, this... is bad news! Excuse me, Lord Kaito!"

"Woah!"

Hina dashed at full speed, picking up Kaito in a princess carry to head off. In the next instant, chains struck their former location. Caught in the storm, an abandoned house collapsed immediately, scattering charred timber fragments and ash in the surroundings.

After the dust settled, only Elisabeth remained standing in the center.

Like a cat with all hairs standing on end, she was panting heavily.

Marianne had backed away. The few remaining Knights were standing in a row, blocking in front of her. Before they could charge at her, Elisabeth stabbed the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstein into the stone tiles at her feet.

"Hell Hole!"

This shout summoned an earthquake, causing the road surface to sink into a funnel shape, ensnaring all of The Knights.

At the bottom of the pit, countless insects were writhing around. These insects, covered with metallic carapaces, glinting with black luster, seemed to be creatures from another world. The Knights' bodies were submerged in insects. Their rotten flesh bitten off by the insects' tiny teeth, they emitted horrific screams. Faced with this abundance of food, the swarm of insects chirped in frenzied delight.

".....!"

Marianne backed away step by step but a chain penetrated the surrounding ground and flew out like a snake, entangling her skinny body and massive bust tightly, hanging her into the air exactly how she remembered Elisabeth had done so previously. As though wanting to know Elisabeth's answer to her earlier cries, she stared straight at Elisabeth.

In front of her, Elisabeth was wearing a solemn expression with both hands superimposed on her sword's hilt.

"I am sorry, Marianne. I knew all that long ago, but kept it to myself."

Marianne's eyes widened slightly in surprise. Elisabeth stared back straight into her blue-gray eyes.

"In this world, not one of my people deserved to die by my hand. Everyone I killed had wholesome existences and the right to enjoy their lives. Whom I killed were innocent people. Cruelly, tragically, mercilessly, tyrannically, I sliced them up. Marianne, what you say is right. There is no way for me to redeem such heavy sins even with my death."

Elisabeth confessed her sins sincerely but at the same time, she spat at the stone tiles. Recounting and admitting her sins, but unrepentant... Elisabeth declared firmly:

"It was with full knowledge and understanding of all this that—I became Torturchen."

What was the reason behind that? Elisabeth did not elaborate.

The empty wind blew against her gorgeous hair. Carrying the heat from the remains of the great fire, the wind howled in apparent lamentation.

Contemptible Elisabeth, terrifying Elisabeth, ugly and cruel Elisabeth!

Be cursed, be cursed, be cursed, be cursed, forever be cursed, Elisabeth!

Taking on the grudge and hatred from all of the deceased on her own, Elisabeth continued:

"I desire neither forgiveness nor understanding. I used to take joy in screams and take pleasure in despair. With derision, profanity and cursing, go to hell... My apologies, Marianne."

".....My lady."

"Soon enough, I shall follow in your footsteps. Worry not, it will definitely not be long."

Elisabeth curled the corners of her lips slightly. Although the childish look persisted for merely an instantly, she looked more vulnerable than usual.

Elisabeth applied more force to the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl in her hand. Seeing that, Marianne shook her head.

She closed her eyes, then opened them, speaking softly with a calm expression like a governess.

"My lady, I know. The Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl is a high-level catalyst for summoning torture instruments and chains. However, it itself is sword of execution forged for the sake of decapitating sinners while burned at the stake, to relieve them of prolonged pain and suffering, a weapon filled with warm compassion. Do you intend to kill me with something like that?"

"Indeed. I shall use it to chop off your head, you ordinary woman who has gone insane."

"That will not do, my lady. This runs completely counter to your style. You must not grant mercy to me alone. Since your twistedness cannot be rectified even unto death, please use a torture instrument on me to slaughter me cruelly."

Elisabeth tensed her expression slightly. Marianne's eyes were filled with strong determination while she scolded Elisabeth:

"Only by rejecting and slaughtering me with pain and suffering will you prove that there is no one capable of shaking your spirit. That even after you were captured to become a dog of the Church, your spirit remains that of a tyrant... In that case, such is your true colors!"

Marianne closed her eyes for a moment then opened them slowly. With a solemn expression, as a governess, she gave Elisabeth a final warning.

"Showing mercy to even one person will shake your determination. Remember this well."

Elisabeth did not respond. However, Marianne suddenly put away her strict expression as a governess. Like facing a willful child, she showed a very gentle gaze.

"I love you sincerely, my lady. Even after things have come to this, my admiration for you has not changed the slightest since your childhood."

Marianne smiled gently then spoke with sincere sorrow:

"If you were to kill me now, I fear that there will never be anyone in this world who will love you."

"Yes, you are correct. Forever and ever, there will be no one."

Elisabeth quietly agreed. Marianne nodded and lowered her head as though waiting for her execution.

Elisabeth released the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl she was holding, her gorgeous black hair fluttering in the breeze. She looked up at the sky with an exceptionally calm expression. A heavy silence was hanging between the two women. The executioner and the condemned. Neither of them moved.

At that moment, the air around Kaito made a noise and froze.

\* \* \*

"...What's happening?"

A few seconds after the strange noise resembling glass shattering, Kaito finally noticed what was odd in the surroundings.

The scene within his view had taken on a slightly blue tinge, frozen. Elisabeth, Hina and the particles of bone and dust rolling in the wind, everything was motionless. Kaito reached out in trepidation, but a transparent membrane seemed to be isolating him from the frozen objects, preventing him from even touching them.

"What's going on? Hey, Elisabeth, Hina!"

Kaito yelled loudly but they could not hear him at all. No response. Just as Kaito was feeling confused, he suddenly felt someone behind him and turned around.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance, innocent soul."

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance, innocent soul."

He saw two girls dressed in a maid uniform even more archaic than Hina's, raising their skirt hems in a curtsy.

One of them was holding in one hand a box that was tied with a ribbon. The other was holding up a watch whose hands had stopped. Their long hair, flowing down their back, was made of gold thread, with cracked violet gemstones embedded in their eye

sockets. Seeing artificial organs, Kaito realized that these two were not people but dolls.

Expressionless, they moved only their lips once again.

"Do you think Elisabeth will kill her?"

"Will Torturchen be able to do the deed?"

"What's going on? What are you two talking about?"

"How tragic, killing someone who loves you."

"How sad, killing someone who admires you."

"You're right, but it's not like I can stop it."

Kaito clenched his fist. He did not understand what kind of bonds and debts existed between Marianne and Elisabeth, nor what kind of memories they had between them, nor what they were currently thinking, so he had no idea what would be right.

This was Elisabeth's choice and decision. Her choice had no room for Kaito's half-baked ideas to interfere at all. However, the two maids shook their heads in perfect unison.

"Who say anything about stopping her?"

"Not a single word."

" "We are not asking what *you will do*, not what Elisabeth will do." "

"...Huh?"

Kaito had no clue what they were talking about anymore. Besides, who the heck were they?

The maid holding the box cleared her throat mechanically and quietly approached. Kaito stepped back warily. However, the maid untied the ribbon and opened the lid, openly presenting the contents to Kaito.

The instant he saw that thing, Kaito felt a violent urge to vomit. He covered his mouth with his hands.

"...Gah, urgghhhh."

Inside the box, a great many spiders with crow feathers on them were writhing. Palm-sized spiders in layer after layer were scurrying about on eight legs that were covered in feathers. In the center of the box, there was a baby buried in the spiders, unbelievably. Kaito wanted to reach out to rescue him, but instantly gasped in horror.

"Don't tell, this is..."

"Oh dear, he realized, huh?"

"Yes, he figured it out, huh?"

A closer look showed that the chubby healthy baby's lower body had spider legs. Already filled with teeth, his little mouth was shaped in an exceptionally cruel grin.

Feeling a penetrating shock to his head, Kaito understood at the same time.

"This thing... Don't tell me it's The Earl?"

Speaking of which, The Earl was not among the swarms of demons recreated with rotten flesh attacking them earlier.

Kaito shuddered in revulsion and took a step back. At the same time, the two maids spoke:

"Marianne has preserved The Earl's soul too."

"We have injected it into a human baby."

" "Left alone, he would probably grow up into something like that accursed man." "

With a flabby hand, the baby was stroking the spiders' backs like playing lovingly with pets. With eyes filled with crafty intellect, he looked down at the spiders, smiling contentedly with malice.

Kaito subconsciously raised a fist but did not swing it down. If this thing before him were identical to The Earl last time, he would be able to strike a killing blow. This was something he had wanted to do countless times. However, although this thing was fundamentally the same as The Earl, it was still a baby after all.

Kaito could not bring himself to hit him, much less kill him. Murdering a baby in cold blood would make him no different from his father. He forced his tightly clenched fist open and slowly stroked his own cheek that had turned pale.

Noticing Kaito's appearance, the two maids exchanged glances and nodded.

"Ah, sure enough, it is beyond him right off the bat."

"Oh well, we will just have to be patient."

" "Let it be for now." "

The maid with the box raised it high then dashed it to the ground without hesitation.

The spiders panicked and rushed out from gaps in the smashed box. The baby also crawled out, flattening the escaping spiders that got in his way. The maid used the tip of her foot to flip the baby then stepped down hard on him.

"Wha!"

With inhuman strength, the baby's fat belly was deformed under compression and exploded. A huge number of organs were squeezed out, different from human ones in shape. Amid the vivid pool of blood, the baby twitched for a while then became motionless. Witnessing this excessively cruel scene, Kaito was speechless. In front of him, the two maids shrugged.

"Very well, it is flattened now. Are you relieved?"

"It has been well taken care of. Nothing to worry anymore, right?"

"I wasn't... No, that's not it. I definitely am relieved... Damn it, this sucks! But you're the ones who made that thing in the first place! Why did you do that?"

"Precisely. Even if we squash one now, more can be created."

"So long as the necromancer keeping the soul in her womb does not die, it can be recreated endlessly."

Listening to the two maids, Kaito felt a chill through his entire body. He glanced at the baby's pitiful corpse. To think that they could create more of this thing, that was definitely no joking matter.

"Now the issue we face is this. Will Elisabeth kill her, or not kill her?"

"If she does not kill her, we will capture Marianne and use her to mass produce The Earl."

Kaito turned towards Marianne, who was restrained by chains, only to see her pale face showing she was fully prepared for death and well as deeply tired of life. She was not supposed to be someone who would become a necromancer in the first place.

"...So what you're saying is that you guys are going to cruelly force her to work, even though she's already broken, is it?"

"Until Marianne's fragile mind completely breaks, we will keep mass producing The Earl to release outside."

"Indeed, when the time comes, that scene will reappear. Countless instances of Grand Guignol will be reenacted happily nonstop."

The two maids smiled coldly at each other. Kaito could feel his vision turning red from anger.

At the same time, the spider's restless appearance surfaced in Kaito's mind. The pitiful screams of the children. Neue cursing helplessly, smiling while crying, then dragged away to disappear.

He felt as though he could hear pitiful screaming and the sound of the young man's neck being broken. The first person to wish Kaito a happy life had been cruelly killed in this manner.

Anger and blood lust filled up Kaito's mind, causing a weird noise like grinding gears somewhere in his brain. Kaito slowly looked up, his eyes abnormally widened. In an icy voice, he asked the two maids:

"Do you think I will let you succeed?"

"This courage, foolhardy at best, is quite impressive."

"But you are misguided. The one you need to kill is not us."

Raising one side of their skirt hem, lowering one knee, the two maids curtsied gracefully again. The maid who had thrown away the box motioned to the chain-bound Marianne while the other maid held a watch up high.

"Very well, time to resume."

"You have only seconds to make your call. Please be decisive."

" "Do not leave regrets for yourself." "

Instantly, the two of them vanished and color returned to the world. The cold wind blew, ashes and dust flew in the sky. Biting her lip hard, Elisabeth raised her arm up high.

At the same time, Kaito kicked the ground and took off.

There were only a few seconds left for him to make a decision. Regardless whether Elisabeth was going to snap her fingers or not,

there was no time to wait. If she failed to snap her fingers, there would be no chance to stop events from unfolding, resulting in inevitable tragedy in the future.

Kaito naturally understood what the two maids were hinting at. Thinking calmly and clearly, he understood what he needed to do and instantly turned thoughts into action.

Kaito pulled out the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl from the ground. Possibly due to magical assistance, the sword was unexpectedly light. He turned towards Elisabeth and ignoring her surprised red eyes, he walked up to her extremely naturally, forcing himself to ignore the legitimacy of this act.

(Even if I don't do it, Marianne will still be killed. Either dying in pain and suffering under Elisabeth's torture or being exploited to the limit by others until she is useful to no one, these are the only paths awaiting her.)

Hell was the end, regardless which path taken. This fact diluted Kaito's sense of guilt, allowing him to choose the only solution without resistance.

"—Sorry."

Kaito made a thrust at Marianne with the sword.

Magically enhanced, the blade effortlessly pierced her chest.

".....Huh?"



Marianne widened her eyes in shock and coughed out a lot of blood. Showered with blood in that instant, Kaito felt like he was waking up from something. Warm blood dripped down his face. Instantly, he was confused what he was doing. Suppressing the stomach acid that was surging up, he slowly withdrew his hands from the sword's hilt. Making eye contact with Marianne, all he could do was move his lips, repeating "sorry." Looking at Kaito's expression, for some reason, Marianne smiled.

"A-Ahhh... W-With this... Finally, re... pa... id—"

Uttering fragmented words, her face finally froze in a peaceful expression and her neck fell powerlessly.

Ruminating over her final words in a daze, Kaito realized a certain possibility at the same time.

"...Don't tell me, you..."

Could it be that Marianne actually did not want Elisabeth to keep adding to her sins? However, there was no time for Kaito to ponder this before he was viciously blown away from the side.

"Gwah!"

A flying kick delivered to Kaito's abdomen sent him sliding, falling on the road that was covered with fragmented stones and ash, only stopping when he finally smashed into a pile of rubble. The intense pain, making him wonder if some of his organs had ruptured, was radiating throughout this body. While coughing blood, Kaito looked up.

Elisabeth was standing at his earlier location, looking expressionlessly at Marianne's dead body. After a fairly long time,

she suddenly gripped the hilt of the sword buried in Marianne's chest and pulled it out forcefully. A great amount of blood dripped down, turning the ground black.

With her black hair fluttering, she turned towards Kaito. Filled with cold fury, her eyes narrowed.

"Useless dog, why did you act without permission? If you answer fails to satisfy me, I expect you know the outcome?"

Kaito gazed blankly at the pale hand approaching him from the front. But just as her fingertips were about to touch him, Kaito found the sky and earth spinning before him. Hina had picked him up in her arms and jumped to the side. Holding Kaito with her right arm, she raised the halberd warily in her left, sliding on the ground before finally stopping. Elisabeth clicked her tongue.

"Put that thing down, puppet."

"I refuse. You are not my master."

The two of them glared at each other, about to fight any moment. Probably judging that Elisabeth was not an opponent she could handle with one hand, Hina put down Kaito and stepped forward to shield him. Elisabeth grinned in exasperation.

Kaito wanted to stop them from fighting but only irregular breathing leaked out when he opened his mouth. Unable to speak. He desperately forced air down to the bottom of his diaphragm, his abdomen aching, and stuttered:

"Y-You two, cut it out."

Just as he finally squeezed these words out with difficulty, he realized his surroundings had frozen again.

The two maids were standing within his view, blurred from the intense pain and the impact on his abdomen. One of the maid's shoe was dirty from the baby's bodily fluids. The other was holding up a watch. The two of them stared at Kaito expressionlessly with their cracked violet eyes. In the next instant, the two beautiful faces turned unbelievably twisted into gentle expressions.

With utterly terrifying smiles, they curtsied gracefully towards Kaito again.

"You passed, innocent soul."

"Our master will summon you."

The two maids hummed a melody in a good mood and grabbed the immobile Kaito by the shoulder. Kaito could not muster any strength even if he wanted to resist, and was forcefully lifted up. Gradually dragged away, Kaito turned his head weakly to look back. After being pulled some distance away, the blue and frozen scenery suddenly started to move again.

"Hmm? ...Kaito?"

"Huh? L-Lord Kaito? No way... Lord Kaito, where did you go!?"

Noticing that Kaito had disappeared, Elisabeth and Hina frantically looked around them. Dragged not too far away, Kaito stared at

them, hoping they could find him. Hina looked in Kaito's direction but in that instant...

Growwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwl

growwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwl, growwwwwwwwwwwwwl.

Darkness swirled in a vortex as though to block their view, looking as though it would devour everything. The darkness growled while forming beautiful muscles and sleek black fur of the highest quality.

Soon after, the darkness transformed into an exquisite hound with the fires of hell burning in its eyes.

Freezing the surrounding air with its imposing presence, The Emperor had appeared.

Guhiehehehhehehehe, huyuhehehehehehehe,  
guhieheheheheheh.

Towards Elisabeth and Hina, that thing emitted what resembled human laughter.

At the end of this despairing scene, Kaito's consciousness faded into darkness.

# エリザベート・レ・ファニユ

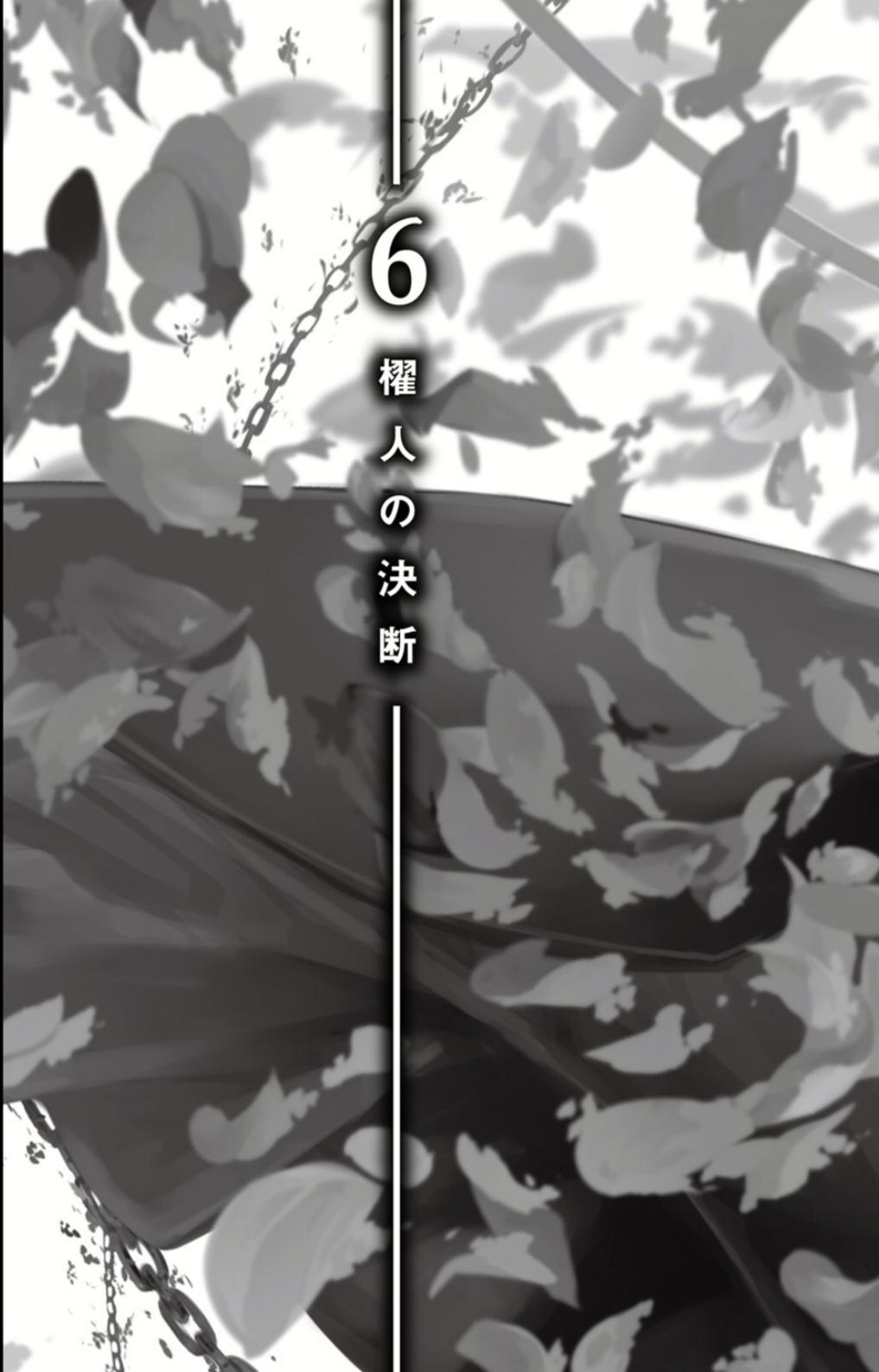
『拷問姫』。領民の惨殺、貴族にまで及んだ拷問の咎で処刑されることが決定している美しい少女。『処刑の前に善行を成せ』と教会から悪魔と契約した男達の処罰を命じられている。





# 6

## 権人の決断



## Chapter 6 - Kaito's Decision

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Even if given the chance to repeat his life, Kaito still considered his life absolutely terrible.

Being called an innocent soul did not feel real to Kaito at all. He even ended up as a murderer in this world.

Although he had indirectly assisted in murder before and helped dispose of bodies, he had never killed someone directly with a blade.

His new life was downright awful. Witnessing unimaginably horrific scenes frequently, beaten and tortured unreasonably at whim, even ending up in situations where he had no choice but to sever his own arm or carved deep wounds on his stomach. But at the same time, he had also made unforgettable memories.

He had received benevolent wishes from others. He had been protected by others.

These were warm words that he had received by plunging his arm into mud, ripping his skin repeatedly with razor blades.

Originally, this sort of warmth was nothing more than snippets of happiness easily obtainable in normal life. However, Kaito had to risk his life in order to hold such warmth in his hand.

Precisely because of that, a certain emotion had actually started taking root in Kaito's heart.

He was absolutely not some kind of innocent soul. The scene before his eyes was tantamount to hell. Yet even so...

This utterly unreasonable second life was not all bad.

His being reborn like a bug was not completely pointless, perhaps.

However, to this day, he had yet to tell anyone about these feelings of his.

\* \* \*

Kaito woke up to find himself sitting in a luxurious chair. His view was quite dim. The scenery before his eyes gradually melded with darkness. Touching the intricately carved armrest, he looked around him.

(Where the heck... is this place? Why am I here?)

Before him, a pearly tablecloth extended straight ahead of him. Placed on it were silver tableware and food that was as colorful as waxen artwork.

The appetizers included translucent oyster jelly, bright orange marinated salmon, and all kinds of pate. A whole pig roasted to a

golden color. Vegetable quiche and fragrant shrimp soup. Honeyed fruits. Cake covered with crushed almonds. Caramelized pudding decorated with berries on top.

Giving off great aromas, the dishes covered the entire table. Flames flickered from the red candlesticks, illuminating the table of lovely food that seemed almost fake. However, no one was partaking in this grand feast of delicacies.

There was only one host at the table. A man in black.

He was dressed in a silk shirt with a tie and coat embroidered with silver thread. Instead of the dishes on the table, he was eating something on his pure white plate.

On the porcelain plate was a red-black piece of meat, still dripping with blood. Thinly slicing what looked like raw liver that had not even been seasoned, the man brought the pieces to his lips using his fork.

Amid the darkness illuminated by candlelight, the faint sound of tableware colliding echoed.

Those red eyes, lustrous black hair, handsome face with androgynous beauty were all impressed deeply in Kaito's memory.

This man... Vlad, was very similar to Elisabeth in appearance.

(What... the heck. Of all people, why was I the one who's been dragged to face the final boss?)

Kaito examined himself in his confusion. Although the pain in his abdomen had not gone away, at least his arms and legs could move freely. He was not tied up and neither did there seem to be any magical restraints.

Kaito looked for Vlad's openings. Vlad was eating quietly, looking like he was single-mindedly enjoying the meat without thinking anything. Kaito wondered if this counted as an opening. Next, he turned his head to check the room's situation. However, even the interior of the room was unclear. The light from the candles faded the farther away from the table. It was as though this giant room melded into one with the darkness.

(If I can't even find the entrance, this is bad.)

Kaito suppressed the anxiety in his heart and adjusted his breathing, trying his best to calm down. However, smoke with a beastly odor was drifting over from the candles, disrupting his nerves. As though guided by that smoke, he recalled the black dog with eyes burning with hellfire.

(Oh right, Elisabeth and Hina... I hope they're alright.)

"Eh? Are you worried?"

Startled, Kaito looked up, only to see a surprised expression on Vlad who had stopped eating. Both his tone and vocal quality sounded younger than expected. Not knowing how to answer, Kaito chose silence.

"Ah yes, mental confusion would only be natural seeing as you were invited here so suddenly. Excuse me."

Vlad nodded on his own and snapped his fingers. Darkness and blue petals swirled in a vortex before Kaito to produce a silver basin filled with water. Shown on the water's surface, calm as a mirror, was an outside scene.

Kaito leaned forward to look and widened his eyes in surprise.

Elisabeth and Hina were advancing along the sloped path leading to the castle while fighting a gigantic black dog.

Hina swung the halberd, striking the black dog's leg but the blade was unable to pierce the muscle under the thick fur. Elisabeth summoned countless iron stakes to stab the black dog's back but they were all deflected. Confronted with the approaching jaws, she summoned chains to wrap around the dog's snout. Although she managed to restrain the dog, a decisive blow seemed beyond her.

'Damn it, instruments of torture and execution are not effective at all. Should I say as expected of The Emperor?'

Elisabeth spat blood at the ground but her acute intent to kill did not weaken. However, in those blood-red eyes of hers, the color of impatience could not be hidden.

Supporting himself with two hands on the table, Kaito yelled:

"Elisabeth!"

"My, don't you find that her personality is a bit too impatient? In my view, Elisabeth's flaw is that her flash point is even lower than dynamite's. To arrogantly think that she could overwhelm the opponent with brute strength when facing The Emperor, how utterly foolish. But on that note, choosing to fight *him* is in itself already a mistake."

Vlad shrugged. He sounded very cordial, like talking about a willful child. He elegantly delivered the last piece of meat into his mouth, licked blood from his lips, and used his fork to point at the silver basin that Kaito was watching.

"The Emperor is the highest ranked of all the demons we summoned, the extreme of all demons summoned by mankind. Even the famous 'Torturchen' Elisabeth cannot kill him so easily. Were he so easy to kill, The Emperor would fail to live up to its name. Priding in himself as a top-quality hound, he stands at the pinnacle of the fourteen, on a completely different level compared to the rest under him."

Kaito clenched his fist at the thought of Elisabeth and Hina fighting against such an enemy, but at that moment, he spontaneously found a point of doubt.

"W-Wait a sec. The demon is over there. Yet you are here... Does that mean you entered a contract with The Emperor but did not merge together?"

"Indeed. Elisabeth should have told you that The Emperor manifests in this world using me as the medium. In a certain way, the two of us are two entities in one. Logically speaking, out of safety concerns for the body, merging together is more appropriate."

However, I have no wish to abandon the pleasures afforded to the human body, to transform into one of those deformed bodies. Because that would be ugly to the point of making one laugh, wouldn't you agree?"

Vlad chuckled. Despite his cold appearance, he candidly mocked his demon brethren. Kaito recalled how Elisabeth had laughed at a demon's devotee and what she had said.

Shaking his head, Kaito continued:

"In other words, you are currently using your original body of flesh? If you're killed, The Emperor dies too?"

"Precisely! However, isn't it utterly foolish for you to confirm this matter with me? Seeing that you are completely ignorant of the situation, allow me to enlighten you—You cannot kill me."

Vlad asserted calmly, wiping blood off his lips with a napkin then proceeded:

"On the other hand, it would be possible for Elisabeth... Because neither she nor I are ordinary people."

Blue petals and darkness gathered at his fingertip. The napkin he released from his hand was shredded, forming a spiral in the air and suddenly burned. Next, the white ashes drifted onto the dining table.

Watching the way Vlad controlled darkness and blue petals, Kaito realized that this man was precisely the human closest to what Krulus feared, "Elisabeth forming a contract with a demon."

"Why bring me here? Are you trying to use me as a hostage?"

"...My apologies, I am not trying to mock you, but I feel that you truly fail to understand... Do you actually believe you have value as a hostage?"

"Not really. I don't contribute to combat strength and Elisabeth probably doesn't care if I live or die either."

"Indeed, that is correct. I have a proposal for you personally, which is why I had you brought here."

Once again exhibiting candidness that could be described as innocence, he nodded. However, Vlad suddenly turned solemn. Steepling his hands, he stared straight at Kaito.

"I wish to adopt you as my son, to make you a second Elisabeth."

"I refuse."

What did he mean by "a second Elisabeth"? While pondering the meaning, Kaito already declined on reflex.

Despite his mental confusion, he replied without hesitation. With The Emperor's contractor offering to adopt him, Kaito had no choice but to refuse. However, Vlad made a surprised look for some reason and continued:

"Elisabeth is my beloved first daughter, *my greatest masterpiece of excessive perfection*. Her growth outstripped my expectations but in the end, she broke ties with me. I wish for a replacement and for the

sake of what I have obtained so far and everything I shall accumulate in the future, I need a successor."

"Even so, why pick me out of all people? I don't get it."

"I see potential in you, equal to hers or even higher. According to Krulus' report, you are an innocent soul, killed in an undeserved death through cruel means, yes? You possess deep knowledge of human suffering yet can stare at wounds calmly. Furthermore, you have a strong reaction towards hatred. There is a proud side to you."

"And nothing more than that. There's still a huge gap between the real me and your opinion."

"Is that so? I do not believe there is such a great difference. I see great promise in those who are capable of killing to fulfill aims despite knowing pain. There is plenty of room for growth in the negative side."

Vlad snapped his fingers. The two blonde maids from earlier appeared behind him. Blinking their cracked violet eyes, they curtsied elegantly. Surprised, Kaito glared at them.

Kaito did not know if Vlad noticed the hostility in Kaito's eyes, but Vlad continued like singing a song.

"Most importantly, you have been killed. You have been deprived of everything. Those who have been deprived gain the right to be plunderers. At least, you have the disposition to entrench the notion of 'the right to plunder' into your mind. It is very suitable for the matter of gathering human suffering, an essential desire. Because half-baked thirst will only cause one to be devoured by one's

desires. 'Qualification'—The 'qualification' enabling one to become a tyrant matter-of-factly is essential."

Vlad monologued like a poet, analyzing like a scholar.

Kaito desperately resisted to avoid getting swallowed up by his words. Listening to that voice that seemed like a strange incantation under candlelight, Kaito felt like his consciousness was about to be taken away by Vlad. Refusing to lose himself, Kaito did not wish to, nor did he think he could, become Elisabeth.

What the man before him was saying was nothing more than the words of a madman.

"Since childhood, Elisabeth had been plagued by the fear of tyrannical death. That pain and terror forged her to become the greatest work of art. I want to make you my second masterpiece to become my successor. That being said, wanting a son after losing my daughter would be the most direct way of putting things... What do you say?"

"I refuse. Shut your babbling mouth. You're pissing me off."

"A very energetic answer! However, you should still listen to me for a bit. It doesn't cost you anything."

Vlad did not make a move. He narrowed his eyes like a mischievous youth. Or perhaps, his resembled those of a dog breeder's, scrutinizing a puppy and hearing the puppy giving off a good bark.

"I will not despise you as Krulus did, nor will I seek to exact any price from you. Never. Because doing so would be completely

unreasonable... Despite saying that, doesn't it seem a little strange for me to be reasoning with you?"

"What are the terms you intend to offer? The safety of Elisabeth and Hina?"

"Certainly not! How could matters between a father and a daughter be decided by the choice of someone like you? My beloved daughter, adorable, endearing, foolish, contemptible Elisabeth's fate shall be determined by myself and the The Emperor. This is love. Know your place, lad—She is the beloved daughter of mine, Vlad Le Fanu's."

Instantly, Vlad's red eyes were filled with cold light. He stood up and walked over to Kaito, tracing his black fingernail across the surface of the water in the silver basin. Elisabeth's image shook for a moment.

"My relationship with her will not permit any interference from the likes of you."

After delivering such a viscous gaze, he smiled cheerfully again.

"Indeed! The terms I offer you ought to be more wonderful, something extremely valuable to you. My skill in magic surpasses that of Elisabeth, allowing me to secure a link with another world quite effortlessly."

Vlad puffed out his chest with pride. His expression of delight was like a child inviting a friend over to play a game. He said he wanted to adopt Kaito as his son, yet he was showing such innocent childishness. But suddenly, Vlad's lips began to curl deeply to reveal an evil grin. Seeing that look, Kaito understood unavoidably.

Despite forgoing a merge, this man himself was unmistakably a demon.

Demons would target openings in human hearts.

"Just a few days ago, your father sank into the ocean due to a bit of trouble he got himself into. How about summoning him here to serve as your toy?"

The instant he heard these words, Kaito's heart stopped for an instant.

\* \* \*

"...Don't tell me, that guy... He died?"

By the time he came to his senses, Kaito had already stood up. The chair made an exaggerated noise and fell over backwards. The silver basin shook and the image on the water surface disappeared. However, Kaito was too preoccupied to care about any of that.

Kaito felt a shock as though his head had been struck violently by a hammer. After a while, he felt a strange sense of emptiness. He felt like his chest had become hollow, like his heart had been crushed.

Vlad's words was this unexpected for Kaito. That was why Kaito felt such a great shock.

Dead... That man died. That bastard, whom Kaito thought would live on forever no matter what happened, was dead...

"Yes, indeed. He died. Congratulations! Or rather, he got what he deserved... Hmm, although I consider myself a synonym for evil, would saying something like that be a contradiction? Whatever, let the contradiction continue! An ending that feels great! Come, what is your decision?"

"Decision? What can I do... My old man is dead."

"Did I not mention just now? I could resurrect him to serve as your toy as a gift! If you wish to avenge your own death, I suggest you should agree to my terms. Don't worry, you have no need to feel shy or to hide anything."

Vlad kept nodding to show understanding and cordiality, smiling innocently at Kaito.

With an expression like inviting someone to a cruel game, he continued:

"Rip his intestines, crush his lungs, strangle his neck. It will be very fun, right?"

*I must not listen to Vlad's sweet words, those are words of a demon...*

Despite knowing that, Kaito could not resist the mud of emotions surging violently from the bottom of his cracked open heart.

He yearned to tear out that man's innards, to kill him mercilessly when he begged for mercy. Simply imagining that scene made him feel good inside. If he actually did that, how exhilarating it would be.

By doing so, the fear and hatred restraining him like shackles all this time would surely all disappear.

Surely, it would be worth abandoning all his values as a human for the rest of his life.

"At least-----Let me think for a while."

In the end, Kaito squeezed these few words from his throat like spitting blood. Under the emotions of extreme excitement, dizziness, resembling fear, his body was trembling slightly. Vlad nodded deeply.

"Of course, time is in abundant supply... At least for you."

Hearing Vlad say that to him, Kaito turned his hollow gaze towards the water surface. A sharp flash of silver flew across his view.

'—Take that!'

A giant scythe of execution descended on the black dog's neck but the dog caught it with its mouth and crushed it between its jaws. Hina's maid uniform was tattered all over and covered in holes while she was swinging her halberd.

'Lord \_\_\_\_! Lord \_\_\_\_! Lord \_\_\_\_! Lord \_\_\_\_! Where are you!?'

Taking damage repeatedly, she ignored her own body and desperately called someone's name.

(That's—me...)

Witnessing that kind of scene, Kaito thought he should be feeling something. However, despite understanding the necessity, he did not know how to react. After the intense shock to his mind, he could not process the scene in front of him.

Right now, everything happening before his eyes seemed like it was in another world away from him. It felt like his soul had returned alone to that room when he had been strangled to death.

Not knowing what to do, Kaito reached for the water surface like a child.

His trembling fingers entered the water with a splash.

The mirror-like water surface was disrupted completely, showing nothing after that.

\* \* \*

"This will be your room, Lord Kaito. Please use it as you please until you reach a conclusion."

Another maid, different from the previous pair, bowed to Kaito while holding a lantern in one hand.

When she lifted her face, Kaito saw crooked pearls glinting in the center of her eyes. Probably created a long time ago, her face had some parts that were crumbling. Kaito nodded and she turned around, leaving the room to disappear into the darkness of the corridor. Her slow footsteps as well as the rattling from her left ankle gradually faded into the distance.

Left alone, Kaito moved his blank gaze around this filthy room in a circle.

"...Isn't this *that* room?"

Kaito was visiting the first time but he felt a sense of *deja vu*.

The room's layout approached a cube and there was yellowed wallpaper with a floral pattern on the walls. The cute plaster decorations on the windowsill had a thick layer of dust accumulated. Originally pure white, the furniture had turned filthy, but the golden handles remained bright. What should have been dolls and plushies on top of the dresser were now replaced by rifles and wooden horse models, probably considering Kaito being a *boy*. Covered with cobwebs, the bed surrounded by four posts was

covered by a collapsed mattress. On top of it, several blankets were placed in a criss-cross manner.

Dried bloodstains remained on those blanket's gnarled surface. After checking all this out, Kaito nodded.

"As suspected, this was the child's room where Elisabeth used to live."

Kaito had accidentally trespassed an illusory room in the treasure vault and this room was the real thing.

The door Kaito had found in the treasure vault was probably made of the memories taken from this room and recreated in the magical dimension. Compared to the illusion he had seen back then, the real room was far dirtier, but the interior decoration was virtually the same. It looked like Vlad had replenished some of the objects taken away by Elisabeth, recreating the room that had lost its master or restoring it to a close approximation. Judging from this fact, Kaito could also see his exceptional obsession with Elisabeth. Possibly in consideration for Kaito, some of the decor in the room had been slightly changed to suit a boy, it felt rather ludicrous.

".....Hoh."

Suddenly, Kaito lost his sanity completely. The intense desire to laugh was making him hold his stomach tightly. Everything was too funny. Opening his mouth wide, he laughed to his fill.

"Hahahaha, hahahahaha, hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

His muscles convulsed, his tears came out. Even in the end when laughing became painful, Kaito still continued to laugh like mad. He had gone crazy, insane beyond compare. Whether his father's unsightly death or the current situation, everything was nothing more than a ridiculous farce.

Also, these were all lies.

—————Bam!

Suddenly, Kaito's laughter stopped and he smashed his fist hard against the wall. His bones fractured, stinging sharply, but he still swung his fist again. Leaving blood on the wall, breaking his fingers, Kaito still showed no intention to stop, punching the wall like mad while yelling:

"Dead huh! That guy's dead huh! Killing others on whim and getting killed himself in the end huh! Serves him right! But... But how could I let go of my grudge so easily!? How could I possibly forgive you!? I must kill slaughter you again, by my own hand!"

Kaito pummeled the wall again. Inside his tightly held fist, his little finger snapped. Even though hatred and anger filled his mind, he still did not regain his calm at all. Like a child in a tantrum, he was pushed around by turbulent emotions amid crying. After panting heavily, he smashed his forehead against the wall and muttered emptily:

"But... Letting a murdered victim kill someone who has already dead, that's... I totally don't get it."

With self-deprecation, Kaito revealed his thoughts then smiled weakly. Soon after, Kaito moved his head lightly away from the bloodstained wall and looked around his surroundings as though seeking help from someone.

Unintentionally, his gaze stopped at the bed.

".....Elisabeth."

In his weary eyes, a vague image of Elisabeth as a young girl surfaced.

That sickly looking beautiful girl, half her body buried in the sea of blankets, sitting on the bed. Her completely lifeless and hollow eyes also reflected Kaito. Her beautiful face was the one thing that had not changed, not then, not now.

Like a child, Kaito's face went distorted as he asked the young Elisabeth:

"Hey, tell me, what exactly did you experience? Why did you end up like that?"

The illusion did not answer. Even so, Kaito continued to question, screaming desperately.

"Tell me, Elisabeth! Why did you choose to become Torturchen!"

This was the question that had been buried deep in his heart, the question he had agonized over all this time.

Why did she become Torturchen? What reasons were behind it, what kind of hatred? Or perhaps, there was nothing at all? However, the illusory girl did not answer, of course.

The Elisabeth in front of him was nothing more than a delusion created by Kaito's mind that was on the edge of a breakdown. Kaito was aware of that himself, but he still wanted to grab the girl before his eyes. Soon after that, the girl's image slowly dissolved and disappeared.

"...Ho, hahahahaha, hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Kaito began to laugh again. He laughed loudly, explosively, madly, rolling on the floor, then started hitting the wall again. His bloody fingers made disgusting noises then he withdrew his hand from the wall and wiped his tears away.

Suddenly, his confusion finally subsided. Suddenly, nothing flowed from his eyes anymore. His wild emotions vanished with abnormal speed. With a mind as calm and clear as the surface of a lake, Kaito quietly reached his conclusion.

No matter how long he laughed, this hatred probably would not ever reach an end.

Kaito had been cruelly and tragically killed.

That was the truth... And nothing more.

\* \* \*

The maid with crooked pearls for eyes was waiting ready outside the child's room.

"Please come to the dining hall. Lord Vlad is waiting for you."

Led by her, Kaito went to the dining hall again. In the darkness, Vlad was the same as before, sitting at the host seat. Unlike Elisabeth, he did not seem to require dessert and had finished his meal rapidly, enjoying his wine now. Kaito looked at his profile while he was swirling his wine glass and said:

"I've decided. Let me kill my old man. He is the one guy I can't forgive even when he's dead."

Vlad put down his glass and said in a gentle voice as though erasing Kaito's guilt for him.

"An excellent decision. Revenge is your deserved right. There is no reason not to exercise it."

There was no surprise on his face. It looked like he had expected this answer from Kaito. That was only natural. Since he hoped to adopt Kaito, naturally, he understood the true nature of the hatred binding Kaito.

Kaito clenched his aching fist and pleaded while hesitating.

"Before that, even if only once... I won't ask you to let me see your daughter Elisabeth, but at least, can I see Hina... Let me say goodbye to her?"

"...Hina? Oh, you mean that puppet of mine that was cast aside without being activated? To think you like it so much, how unexpected. Do you have a hobby of 'playing house with dolls' by any chance? In that case, I could fine-tune a doll similar to her... No, a doll even more suited to your tastes. That would be no problem at all."

"Hina is her own person, my one and only irreplaceable Hina, not a puppet."

Kaito closed his eyes and recalled the warm sensation of being embraced against her bosom. Her adorable face, framed by silver hair, reappeared under his eyelids. However, Kaito opened his eyes to dispel the image.

"Despite our short time together, she did look after me. Also, one more thing... When I'm saying goodbye to Hina, make The Emperor stop attacking. It's too much of a handicap for Elisabeth to fight it alone."

"Deriving the feeling of 'looked after' from a doll, how incomprehensible. What a selfish wish when you have already decided on betrayal... Whatever, I shall make a special exception and consider it your first and last act of willfulness as my successor."

Vlad nodded and issued some kind of order to the blonde pair of maids. Taking the watch, they silently walked out. Watching them depart side by side, Vlad explained proudly:

"That timepiece is an enchanted tool, capable of isolating someone from the stream of time as long as they lack resistance against magic. Back then, the surrounding space seemed to stop from your perspective, yes? But in actual fact, you alone had been separated from the normal flow of time. As users of enchanted tools, that pair of maids could easily kill you in that space while Elisabeth outside could not even touch you. Ultimately, it is something designed to take care of small fry, but robotic dolls are hard to say. Although it usually does not take effect, it might work in this case judging from the injuries previously seen. Very well, how about a glass of wine while you are waiting?"

"No thanks."

"How boring. In my opinion, learning to appreciate wine would make life more enjoyable."

Kaito refused Vlad's suggestion and found a random seat to plunk himself down. Like Vlad, he ignored the food in front of him and clasped his bloody fingers together. Vlad shrugged lightly and took another sip of wine.

After an uncomfortable period that felt endless, the dining hall door opened with the sound of approaching footsteps and something being dragged. Kaito looked in that direction and widened his eyes in surprise.

"...Hina!"

"No need to be subdued, it was already lying in the rubble."

"It appears that Elisabeth left it behind, finding it a hindrance."

"So Elisabeth did it, perhaps not wanting it to fight until its destruction. As always, my Elisabeth is so kind-hearted when she shows kindness. Looks like there is no way for you to have the puppet pass along a message, and have the puppet and Elisabeth 'escape' together."

Listening to the report from the maids, Vlad glanced at Kaito and mocked him. Kaito hastily rose up from his chair.

Hina was supported at the shoulders by the two maids. Her clothing was very tattered with damage to her simulated human skin. Even though she looked like she had trouble even walking, she still kept the halberd cradled in her arms.

"...Lord, Kaito... Ah... Lord, Kaito, where are, you..."

Murmuring like dream talk, she shook her messy silver hair and looked up. Her hollow emerald eyes saw Kaito dashing towards her. At that moment, her eyes widened in surprise and the light of joy returned to her turbid eyes.

"...Lord Kaito!"

Hina broke free from the maids and even tossed away the halberd she had been clutching tightly, spreading her arms like she had forgotten her pain and wounds. Kaito paused. Although it was no longer possible to achieve his goal of having Hina pass along a message and escape together with Elisabeth, his commitment to betrayal had not changed. Right now, he had no right to be hugged by her.

"Lord Kaito! Ahh, thank goodness you are alright!"

"Farewell, Hina. Return to the castle on your own."

Hearing Kaito, Hina also halted in her steps in the middle of rushing at him. Her expression froze completely from intense shock as though a stake had been driven into her heart. Several seconds later, Hina righted her posture and stared straight at Kaito.

She brought her hand lightly to her abdomen, adjusted her breathing then said:

"Lord Kaito, did I do something inadequate?"

"Hina, you did nothing..."

"In that case, I am terribly sorry, but could you point out the error in my ways? I will change everything. I am stupid and even failed to notice my mistakes, but if you could give me a chance to rectify my failures, there would be no greater happiness for me. Please be merciful."

"No, it's not like that. You didn't do anything wrong at all."

Kaito hastily refuted Hina's unexpected speech. With a troubled look, Hina said:

"Then... Then have you tired of me, Lord Kaito? Do you have no wish to see my face ever again? Do you not want me by your side? In that case, I shall plead with Lady Elisabeth for her assistance, to modify this face as much as possible to what you prefer, Lord Kaito..."

"No, Hina, you did nothing wrong. It's just that I've decided to follow this guy."

"Lord Kaito... You are going to... follow Vlad?"

Looking at the person Kaito indicated, Hina looked troubled. Kaito nodded hesitantly.

"I actually don't want to go with him, but there's something I must do no matter what, even if it means that I have to cause other people suffering. And this guy is the only one who has the method."

Saying that, Kaito looked away from Hina's face that resembled an abandoned puppy's.

Hina had not done anything wrong yet Kaito had already made his decision to betray. Precisely because of that, he did not want to make Hina show such an expression, but he could not keep her by his side anymore either.

Currently, Hina did not constitute any threat, so as long as she gave up on Kaito, Vlad would probably let her go.

Besides, their relationship only started from Kaito's accidental activation of her. As long as she forgot Kaito and found a new master, she should be able to spend her life in happiness and peace.

At least, that was what Kaito wanted to believe.

"Forget your preset love, go back and live in freedom. Don't bother with Elisabeth, or Vlad... Forget me and input a new setting."

"Please do not be silly, Lord Kaito."

"Huh?"

Kaito was interrupted by an icy voice. Until now, Hina had never gotten angry at Kaito, not even once. She took a breath and exhaled then righted her posture sternly.

Putting her hand lightly on her magnificent chest, she closed her eyes and spoke quietly:

"Even if these feelings originated from my settings as a robotic doll, my heart belongs to myself alone. The instant I chose you as my master, Lord Kaito, and at the same time was selected by you, I decided to offer my all to you alone. I live because I wish to live for you, Lord Kaito, and I perish because I wish to die for you. Asking me to serve another master would be impossible. Even a command from you, my most revered master, cannot deny these feelings of mine."

"...Hina."

"Why must you follow a man like that?"

"Sorry, I have to go with him. And even if I have give him the rest of my life, I must kill my old man!"

Kaito had started yelling by the time he realized. Perhaps as a reaction brought upon by the wavering in his thoughts, anger, killing intent and all the pain he had suffered in the past, everything filled his heart again. Gnashing his teeth, he breathed heavily like a beast.

Hina seemed to realize something suddenly, changing the sad look on her face. She ought to understand Kaito's past but as though searching for something, she quietly asked him:

"Something like that... Is something like that your happiness?"

"Eh... Huh, happi-ness?"

"Is it truly happiness?"

"Huh? Yeah, I guess."

Shaken by Hina's solemn tone of voice, Kaito could not help but nod. However, he did not know if it really was happiness. In fact, murder was probably an act the farthest removed from the word "happiness." However, as long as he killed his father, that turbid vortex of hatred in his heart should subside.

Hearing his answer, Hina smiled with gentle beauty.

"I am glad for you."

"Huh?"

Hearing the unexpected reply, Kaito reacted with surprise again. For some reason, Hina was nodding. She looked like a mother who understood her child's happiness, smiling contentedly with hands superimposed together.

"Back in the castle, I have never seen you smile from the heart, Lord Kaito... Hence I have been worrying the whole time. Since you say that this is a choice you made for the sake of happiness, Lord Kaito, I shall not say anything more on the matter. With sincere joy from the bottom of my heart, I support the path you have chosen."

"Hina, so you've been worrying about me whole time huh..."

"Your happiness, Lord Kaito, is my happiness, the one and only supreme happiness... I understand. So with this happiness in my heart, I shall comply with your wish and deactivate myself."

"What!?"

This time, Hina's unexpected words caused Kaito to stare wide-eyed. He did not hope for that at all. He was bidding Hina farewell only so that she could live on.

Kaito clutched Hina's shoulders tightly and she looked back peacefully at him.

"Don't be ridiculous, Hina! Why must you deactivate yourself!?"

"Since you will not be needing me, why would I need to continue living? It was not Lady Elisabeth's intention to run away and I was merely in the way. Please rest assured. So long as you are able to obtain happiness, I shall gladly turn back into a puppet."

"Don't be like this... I'm begging you, don't. I don't want you to die. You have to be wise about this."

"So kind... You are really so kind, so merciful. Your infinite concern, I hereby accept it with endless gratitude. However, I have decided long ago that I shall live and die with you. Since you require me no more, my love is therefore forfeit. You have no need to feel guilty about this. Please see me off with simple smiles and praise."

Hina smiled quietly. In her voice was unshakable pride that Kaito could not understand at all. Kaito knew that no matter what he said, he would not be able to overturn her determination. Next, Kaito naturally released his tightened grip. Hina took a step back and raised the hem of her maid uniform's skirt. Her silver hair glittered under the candlelight, swaying lightly. She stepped back with her injured foot and curtsied gracefully.

"Lord Kaito, so long as you do not call my name in the next hour or two, I shall enter eternal slumber. Thank you for your abundant love, to have spent time with you, so kind-hearted that you are... To

be fortunate enough to become your lover, I have no greater happiness than that."

Hina had called such a short time happiness. Her voice was filled with gratitude without the slightest pretense. Hina bowed her head deeply and said:

"With sincere love and gratitude, I set forth for death. Farewell."

After bidding farewell, she picked up her halberd to use as a crutch and walked away unsteadily. Shaking off the hands from the pair of maids intending to support her, she left the dining hall. The determined image of her back soon disappeared into the darkness.

Standing there frozen, Kaito looked blankly to see Hina off.

At the same time, Marianne and Elisabeth's conversation reappeared in his mind.

"If you were to kill me now, I fear that there will never be anyone in this world who will love you."

"Yes, you are correct. Forever and ever, there will be no one."

He had a feeling as though losing something important without knowing it.

Kaito stood there in a daze. However, before he could figure out this deep sense of loss, Vlad said to him from behind:

"Allow me to confirm just in case. Due to a few words from a mere toy, your blood thirst accumulated over the long years have disappeared, thoroughly refreshing your mind, congratulations... This type of miracle did not occur, did it?"

"...Cut the crap. Hurry and summon my old man."

Kaito cursed quietly. Vlad nodded and snapped his fingers.

As though waiting ready all along, the two blonde maids pushed one of those carts used for transporting food to arrive then suddenly opened a silver lid on top.

Lying there was a doll dressed in a black tuxedo without hair, eyes or a mouth.

This ball-jointed doll with pale skin looked quite simple in structure. It was hard to believe it could hold a human soul. Vlad picked up a table knife from the dining table. After spinning the eagle-handled knife deftly in his hand for a while, he suddenly stopped. Using the sharp silver edge, he suddenly slashed halfway through his hand.

One cut severed the artery. The great quantity of blood dyed the tablecloth red then started dripping to the floor. After that, the blood gathered together as though it was alive, beginning to trace out complicated shapes on the ground, different from a teleportation magic circle.

At the same time, Vlad frowned slightly. On his arm under his sleeve, words of holy scripture was glowing red. The Church's

restraints were definitely carved on his body. Whenever he activated magic, he would suffer even greater physical torment. However, his expression was no longer affected by this.

"My words are not falsehoods. My words are not falsehoods. My words are not falsehoods. His soul traverses from one realm to the second, continuing to cry intermittently on the ground, recovering his own form in the sky."

Vlad repeatedly muttered something. The summoning magic circle glowed red in response to her voice.

As the light gradually brightened, the air in the room also changed.

"Take form— — Transcend— — Take form— — Recover— — Take form— — "

Dry air started to dance like thousands of glass fragments with dangerous sharpness. Kaito's gaze chased after these intangible lights, flying all over the place, brushing past the tip of his nose. Indeed, a scene from another world was projected in front of him.

Roads, cars, crowds, advertisement signs, rivers, schools... All were scenes from the world that Kaito had left after being killed.

"You would do best to close you eyes. Ordinary people tend to go insane after staring at this light for too long. You probably have no wish for your mind to be brought back to the other side, right?"

Kaito hastily closed his eyes as soon as he heard Vlad. Even so, the colored light's brightness continued to be imprinted upon his retinas. As much as Kaito tried to avoid the light and focus on the darkness, everything that had happened so far naturally surfaced in his mind.

For the sake of escaping the weird light, Kaito gradually sank into the bottom of his sea of memories.

The fluttering of black hair, the otherworldly beauty declared, sometimes maliciously, sometimes proudly:

'My name is "Torturchen" Elisabeth Le Fanu.'

'Both a proud wolf and a lowly sow.'

'Whether you or I—Both of us are to be forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth, to ultimately die.'

Silver hair fluttering, the beautiful doll showing a gentle smile filled with love.

'Please rest assured. I will protect you at all costs.'

'With sincere love and gratitude, I set forth for death.'

The red-haired youth smiling on the verge of tears, speaking in a trembling voice amid chaos:

'Ah, I'm probably hoping... You could find happiness in this world, I guess.'

Speaking of which, Neue's wish had not come true even at the very end.

By the time he realized this, Kaito's chest began to stir intensely. His heart was aching, his breathing grew difficult. Was this really okay? Would he really not have regrets? Even he was questioning himself honestly as though from a different person's standpoint.

(Shut up, shut up, in spite of this... In spite of this, I have to slaughter my old man.)

"—It is done."

Hence, Kaito opened his eyes.

\* \* \*

".....H-Huh?"

Kaito's father was undoubtedly standing in front of him.

The fierce man with the unkempt beard was looking around him. Scratching his messy black hair, his eyes swiveled around like a

chameleon's, checking out his surroundings. Kaito definitely remembered that distinctive aquiline nose, but unable to accept the situation before his eyes, Kaito was in a deep frown.

Examining this man from head to foot, Kaito muttered quietly after a while:

".....Weird, was he always like this?"

"W-What is this place? Is it the afterlife? Eh, Kaito? Why are you here, asshole? Huh? N-No way... Are you trying to take revenge? How dare you even think of that!?"

His father suddenly started to scream and yell. Even after death, he was still so easy to set off, and through his intuition that bordered on persecution mania, he realized the danger he was facing.

Despite the flying saliva from his constant raving, there was no longer any insanity in those bloodshot eyes of his.

At that moment, Kaito suddenly realized that his father's insanity was almost definitely caused by drugs. Even now, in that face of his, Kaito could still see hints of his cruelty and sadism, which had not changed the slightest. His muscular body, thoroughly accustomed to hurting others, ought to be terrifying but that was all.

The angry shouting face from his father was like the difference between heaven and hell when compared to Elisabeth's evil expressions.

Kaito even thought that his father's expression was far inferior to the bizarre faces of demons, Krulus' cold and condescending gaze, or Marianne's insane sadness. Naturally, he could not compare to Vlad's smiles of delight either.

Kaito could not help but mutter blankly:

"...He's totally... not scary at all."

The fear that used to fill his heart vanished all at once after he witness his father's exceedingly ordinary expression of rage. Anger and intent to kill turned into confusion due to the massive contrast between reality and his feelings. The extreme nervousness causing his entire body to go tense was slowly dissipating. Kaito lost his earlier calm and rubbed his eyes hard.

(Hey, what the hell is going on? Is this him? Is this really him?)

"Hey... Kaito, why are you silent? Huh? I'm talking to you!"

The man before him... had killed him. Originally the incarnation of absolute terror, the person he hated with every fiber of his being, Kaito could no understand at all. Looking at this guy, the threat he presented could not even compare to that of The Earl.

(Ahhh... I get it now.)

Kaito recalled every incident he had witnessed after coming to this world and silently reached a revelation.

(I've seen far too many terrifying things on this side.)

There was too much evil beyond human wisdom. Having spent too long by the side of the woman fighting against such evil, all the things Kaito once feared no longer had any effect on him.

Kaito finally realized that the contemptible and tyrannical *father* no longer existed. In front of him was just a petty man of absolutely no consequence, a man who did not even know about self-control.

Examining the face that kept yelling, Kaito quietly threw out a comment in disappointment.

"...What the hell, this sucks."

In the next instant, he could not help but burst into laughter. His father showed surprise, another ludicrous expression, causing Kaito to laugh even more. Holding his sides, Kaito laughed, rolling on the ground. At the same time, he heard what sounded like the breaking of the heavy chains that had bound him till now. This time, he really felt from the bottom of his heart how ridiculous everything was.

To think that what bounded him was this kind of low-life.

"I don't need him."

"Huh? What's with you suddenly, asshole? Huhhh? How dare you ignore your old man and look down on me? What are you laughing like an idiot for? Have you lost your marbles?"

"I don't need someone like him. The price is too heavy."

Even with him grabbing Kaito by the chest, Kaito simply shrugged. He turned to look back, only to see Vlad in a deep frown. The deep wond on his left wrist had already healed.

(A monster as expected.)

Thinking that, Kaito pointed his thumb at his father while asserting as though a load had been lifted off his heart:

"This guy is totally not worth it for me to kill by putting my entire future on the line."

Although his father did not understand what Kaito was talking about, he seemed to know he was being belittled and swung his fist. Vlad snapped his fingers and instantly stopped Kaito's father's arm, prompting him to stare at his own arm in surprise. Vlad motioned with his chin for Kaito to continue. Kaito nodded and said:

"After coming to this world, I saw hell."

He saw those who created hell and the person who fought against them. He witnessed terrifying scenes where the weak was devoured. And in this hell, he had barely survived. Carving a bloody teleportation circle on his own stomach, forced to help out with no avenue of escape until all demons were destroyed. All this started from a certain woman's tyrannical ways.

"Torturchen" Elisabeth Le Fanu. A proud wolf and a lowly sow.

Right now, Kaito was serving by the side of the most terrifying, the most beautiful, and the most atrocious sinner.

Hence, there was totally no need to feel bound by the likes of this scum before him.

Killed by him... So what?

He had no time to care about something so silly. Kaito still had an important promise to uphold using the rest of his life.

"Even amid despair, there's still hope. Even if I have brace myself and take the plunge, I have to work hard for happiness."

Kaito declared firmly without any hesitation, breaking his contract with Vlad.

Vlad crossed his arms and pondered. He stared straight at Kaito's face then sighed deeply, covering his face with his slender fingers, shaking his head with a dramatic an exaggerated motion.

"It appears that I took you in too late."

"Yes, it's a bit too late."

Faced with Vlad's sad exclamation, Kaito replied casually.

"Definitely."

Vlad nodded, feeling disappointed from the bottom of his heart about the situation, stumbling. He walked over to Kaito's father and placed a hand on his shoulder. At the same time, Kaito's father began to yell randomly:

"Are you looking down at me? Quit putting me up to this kind of crap or else I'll kill you, asshole, I'll kill you!"

It looked like Vlad had restrained his mouth earlier too, no wonder it had been so quiet. Vlad frowned impatiently and brought his lips near Kaito's father's ear. As though a carnivorous predator had brought its teeth near, Kaito's father instantly stopped talking. In a sweet voice, Vlad whispered quietly to that ear which had been deformed from fist fights.

"Killing this thing in front of you again, to let you enjoy a second life, how do you feel about that?"

Kaito's father was stunned for a moment before licking his lips. He accepted things way too easily. At the same time, Kaito turned around and ran. Angry shouts filled with murderous intent were chasing after him.

"Kaito, hold it right there! Stop running!"

"As if I'd stop just because you said so, idiot!"

Correct decisions could be made as long as one's brain was not atrophied. Kaito did not want to just stand there and get killed by him. While making weird noises, his father pursued. Kaito charged

at the entrance he had gone through earlier. The pair of maids did not take any action. Although Kaito did not know if he could make it to Elisabeth alive, at least he had to stop Hina from deactivating even at the cost of his own life. Right now, he should still be able to make it.

At that moment, Vlad snapped his fingers. Blue petals and darkness swirled in a vortex and a stake skewered Kaito's foot.

"Gaahhh!"

Kaito screamed from the intense pain and fell on one knee. At the same time, his father caught up and grabbed the back of his neck firmly, dragging him. Shaking in anger, his father strangled Kaito's neck.

"Quit looking down on me, you fucking kid, quit looking down  
looking down looking down looking down on  
meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

Kaito raised his hand, trying to resist, but his palm ended up pierced by a stake too. His bloody arm dangled powerlessly.

His view gradually contracted and his consciousness faded. Recalling the excruciating feeling of pressure on his windpipe, that kind of sensation was happening on his throat again. Although the golem body was immortal, at this rate, his neck was going to break, severing his arteries. If that happened, death would still occur.

(Am I going... to be killed again?)

Talking such a big game earlier but dying so shamefully in the end. But back then, no one came to rescue him either. If he called for

anyone know, it would probably be useless. No one was going to come for him.

Kaito recalled that gentle smile and warm embrace. Why did he not embrace her tightly when she was leaving...? Kaito felt truly regretful and whispered lightly, shedding a tear.

".....I'm sorry, Hina."

Thud thud thud thud thud thud thud, from somewhere came a noise.

Kaito's father suddenly loosened his grip. Kaito opened his eyes slightly to see his father staring in shock at the direction of the noise. Curious, Kaito turned his eyes forcefully to look in the same direction.

After seeing what was there, his mouth gaped open in shock just like his father.

Hina was on rampage, swinging her halberd like a hurricane while she approached.

Seeing her so fierce, it was hard not to doubt why she had been so weak earlier... Knocking away the maids that went up to stop her, with blushing cheeks and radiant eyes, she called out:

"You called me, right? You called me, right? You just called me, right? Ahhhh, Lord Kaitoooooooo! I will save you now!"



"Holy crap."

Kaito could not help but mutter. Sensing instinctively he was in danger, Kaito's father released him and tried to run. Kaito was thrown to the floor but did not feel any impact. By the time he realized, he noticed he was being held tightly in Hina's right arm. She used her remaining left arm to brandish the halberd in a flash.

"Huh?"

"You will pay with your body for the crime of strangling Lord Kaito."

Kaito's father's upper torso was effortlessly cleaved into two, sliding to one side along the cross-section, spilling blood and guts everywhere. His father was rendered motionless, probably because the instantaneous blood loss had exceeded activity limits.

Hina's strike had not the slightest hesitation or delay. The power was astounding.

Held against Hina's bosom, Kaito was stunned. To insulate Kaito from all impact, Hina dropped the halberd and embraced Kaito with both arms. Naturally, she buried Kaito's face into her bountiful bust. At the same time, she cried out, overjoyed:

"Ahhh, Lord Kaito! You have saved me from the abyss of death once again. Your kindness knows no bounds, your mercy knows no bounds! I heard your merciful voice loud and clear! Until the last instant of my life, I will love you and stop anyone from hurting you!"

"Ha... Hahaha."

Kaito could not help but relax and laugh. All this was a total mess, but joy gradually crept up in his heart. He originally thought no one would save him, but he was wrong.

Also, he would never think that again.

Kaito raised his bloody hand. Seeing it, Hina screamed in sadness, but Kaito ignored the state of his hand and touched her cheek with his trembling hand. Not wanting to soil her pale skin, he only used his fingertips to feel her warmth. After a while, Kaito exhaled in relief.

"Lord Kaito? What is with you? Do your wounds hurt?"

"I'm so glad you survived. Honestly... Honestly thank goodness... I'm sorry, Hina, I'm sorry."

"L-Lord Kaito! Please do not apologize! Are you okay? I will forever serve singlemindedly by your side, whether in sickness or health, so long as this life persists! Ahh, this love! These feelings! Ah, it must be maternal instinct."

Hina murmured with a serious look on her face, but her expression suddenly changed and she looked up sharply. Intense blood lust like an animal's flashed in her emerald eyes.

"Of the rats hurting you, Lord Kaito, one still remains."

Kaito looked up to see Vlad in contemplation, stepping on Kaito's father's internal organs with his shoe. Seeing that frozen profile, Kaito felt his whole body run cold. He was angry with annoyance filling up his mind, even losing the ability to think "crush Kaito and Hina immediately."

"Go to hell, bastard."

"Don't, Hina!"

In the next instant, Hina vanished. Using her battered body to pick up the halberd, with dilated pupils, she attacked Vlad. Without looking back, Vlad snapped his fingers.

With a swirl of darkness and petals, a rotary saw manifested in the air.

The saw went straight for Kaito instead of aiming at Hina. Vlad's disinterested gaze looked like he was testing Hina. Without a second's hesitation, Hina dropped the halberd and twisted herself very forcefully, trying to shield Kaito with her own body.

At that moment, Kaito saw her image superimposed with Neue.

"No, Hina!"

Kaito immediately pushed Hina out of the saw's trajectory.

"Eh? Lord, Kaito?"

Hina widened her eyes in surprise, reaching forward with her hands. Looking at her, Kaito smiled.

Instantly, a burning sensation sliced through his body. Kaito was instantaneously disemboweled. Although the rotary saw looked

very menacing, its sharpness was inferior to the halberd. Thanks to that, Kaito avoided getting chopped into two, but many organs fell out from his wound. Unable to make a sound, he collapsed on the spot. Hina cried out in a frenzy.

"Lord, Kaito!? Lord Kaito, Lord Kaito, nooooooooooooooo!"

"...Ug... Gah, ha... Geh."

Kaito could feel the warmth of his throbbing internal organs on his palm. His heart was pounding, so annoying. Trembling on the ground, he thought with hazy thoughts.

(Will Hina... find a chance... to escape...? Not gonna happen...)

Given her personality, she could not possibly abandon Kaito. He had to find a way to tell her to escape. However, he was in no shape to speak coherently. His vision faded.

In his field of view that was supposed to pitch black, there was a flash of light. What exactly was this feeling? Having experienced the flow of teleportation magic through his abdomen, Kaito was able to understand. This was the restless magical power in Elisabeth's blood that was mixed in his own blood. In this crisis faced with death, Kaito's soul was synchronizing with blood possessing even greater magic.

The blood's memories were automatically recreated.

What appeared before him resembled the flashbacks that people commonly spoke of.

However, this was an extremely evil scene, completely different from what people usually described.

\* \* \*

Countless cruelly slaughtered corpses with hundreds of crows flying over them. A crowd shouting "kill, kill, kill." A girl suspended in the air, dressed in a bondage suit. A sickly young girl, looking out the window of a child's room.

A graceful man ran a finger over her skinny shoulder dressed in a negligee.

THE girl's tousled hair shook, her body trembled in surprise. She hastily looked up, only to see the man raise his arms in a surrendering gesture. Seeing his face, the girl breathed a sigh of relief.

"My goodness, Uncle Vlad, please do not startle me so."

"Hello Elisabeth, my lovely daughter... Have you been a good girl today? Did you secretly kill a cat like last time?"

"Most certainly not. I shan't do anything like that again."

"Really? Oh well, fine. Regardless what you decide, I will keep your secret."

The uncle's handsome face was very similar to hers. He was quite delighted to meet her again. For some reason, he called Elisabeth his daughter instead of his niece.

Elisabeth wanted to respond but suddenly covered her lips. She coughed dryly a few times, leaving traces of blood between her fingers. Seeing her so pitiful, Vlad spoke in a coaxing voice.

"Poor Elisabeth, plagued by incurable illness since birth. Possessing the same cruel nature as me, my lovely Elisabeth. The reason I am here today is because I have brought the 'qualification' from the abyss of death that will cure you of your incurable illness."

"Really? But Uncle, even the doctor says this illness cannot be cured. Also, what do you mean by 'qualification'?"

"You will know when the time comes. Here, take this. Just as I helped you cover up your 'prank,' do not breathe a word about this to anyone, okay?"

The uncle brought his index finger to his lips and winked. Elisabeth nodded innocently. Vlad stroked her gently and took out something from his bag.

"Eat this and you will be able to enjoy your life more than anyone in the world."

Elisabeth reached out and accepted from Vlad the lump of meat that resembled a human heart.

After eating this meat, Elisabeth's life was peacefully extended to sixteen years of age.

Everyone considered Elisabeth's survival a miracle and were overjoyed. However, Elisabeth's parents passed away as though paying the price for the miracle. One night, the horse-drawn carriage carrying them fell down a cliff. Even though the cause was unknown, an old man passing by that road prior to the accident claimed he saw the shadow of a giant black dog.

At the funeral, everyone spent the night in sorrow. Dressed in funeral attire, Elisabeth was sitting by the window as usual. A pale finger slid across her shoulder, prompting her to suddenly lift her tearful face.

Appearing in front of her, dressed in black was the uncle who was supposed to be wandering different lands.

"Uncle Vlad."

"Hello, Elisabeth! It is wonderful that you survived, lovely girl that you are!"

Failing to notice the unnaturalness in his flamboyant ways, Elisabeth was just about to hug her favorite uncle. However, Vlad suddenly clapped his hands in delight. Elisabeth halted and widened her eyes in shock. Her parents had just died yet her uncle was applauding with joy.

"Uncle?"

"It appears that the demon's flesh has succeeded in taking root inside you!"

Back then, Elisabeth did not understand what Vlad was talking about. But looking at his face under the moonlight, she instantly came to realization.

Her uncle's face did not match his age at all. Exceptionally young, exceptionally beautiful... And exceptionally evil.

In a tone of voice like a child inviting others to play a malicious game, Vlad continued:

"Elisabeth, you will no longer die from human diseases. But from now on, you must hurt others and take their pain and suffering of the soul as offerings for your own body. Otherwise, the demon's flesh inside you will decay, causing you to die in abject pain and agony. Worry not, no need to be afraid. Just relax, my lovely and adorable Elisabeth."

Under the moonlight, Vlad smiled, his lips curling maliciously, he shouted:

"Right now, you have plenty of people to use, inherited from your parents' territory. Until you have eaten them all up, until you have eaten your fill, eat as much as you can."

Elisabeth instinctively knew that her uncle's words were not in jest. In fact, she had a faint feeling that what she had eaten at the time was taboo food that must not be touched.

Hugging her shoulders, Elisabeth shuddered. The uncle smiled at her and said:

"Yes, this is it, Elisabeth Le Fanu. Become a sow greedier than anyone."

A few days later, unable to bear the intense pain attacking her entire body, Elisabeth killed someone for the very first time in her life, using a real instrument of torture, with her Uncle Vlad's assistance.

Vomiting while crying, she used the Intestine Extractor to crush her living victim's innards. She used the Iron Birdcage to slaughter a girl. Building up a pile of corpses together with her day after day, Vlad laughed.

"Splendid, splendid, Elisabeth! Continue, continue, Elisabeth! How are you, Elisabeth, my lovely daughter, do you feel joy?"

".....Yes, I do.....Indeed... Perhaps."

Feeling hatred, blood lust and resentment at herself, Elisabeth buried such feelings at the bottom of her heart, staring at the dead bodies with her teary eyes. The more her tears flowed, the greater the sense of guilt, the more people's hatred deepened, increasing without end. Finally, a vicious flower bloomed from Elisabeth.

Her ten-odd attempts at suicide were all stopped by Vlad. After meeting the demons he had summoned, she decided to cast away all hesitation.

"Cry or laugh, nothing changes in the end."

Accepting her cursed fate, Elisabeth used her magic to weave a long skirt, using her accumulated magical power to summon instruments of torture and execution, she began to massacre the residents of the castle town.

Abusing her innocent people, Elisabeth sat alone on her throne, swirling her wine glass.

"Where would you find someone apologizing while eating pork and beef? Crying or regretting, nothing will change what I do. Hence, I have decided... to be arrogant."

"With joy in my heart, I will make everyone in this world my sacrifice."

"Since sacrifice is preordained, who would cry for that and apologize!? I shall sneer while slaughtering you, putting all of you on my plate, to devour completely in joy, then rub my belly in contentment. However, you people possess the right to kill me. Even though I keep devouring you mercilessly nonstop, once the eater and the eaten are reversed in position, I shall die in blazing flames."

"Curse me, begrudge me, decry me to go to hell!"

"I am 'Torturchen' Elisabeth Le Fanu."

"Forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth, a proud wolf and a lowly sow!"

After that, Elisabeth went on to build up a reputation of many bloody legends, obtaining power to rival the highest-ranked demons as a worthy successor to Vlad. Unexpectedly, Elisabeth suddenly raised a banner of rebellion against Vlad, her self-proclaimed foster father.

Using thousands of stakes to impale the armies of devotees led by Vlad, she laughed with a evil expression:

"Hello, Vlad. Surely, you believe that you would never see the day when you are going to be killed, right? Today is the day of reckoning. Die together with me, killed by shallow pigs and disappear!"

Thus, she and Vlad fought each other and both ended up captured by the Church.

Engaging in sin without fear of God, was it ultimately just to sustain her life as one person?

Or was it for the sake of taking out her "father" who kept increasing his allies and power, impossible for humans to oppose him?

To this day, she had never say a word about this to anyone.

\* \* \*

"-----Gah, hah!"

Kaito vomited a load of blood and woke up. It felt like blood forced down his throat had gone back in reverse. This pain and shock seemed to shake his soul from its sluggish state. Elisabeth's memories vanished from his view as though dissolving. With gradual loss of blood from his body, his mind returned to reality.

The ground felt as warm as a blanket and unusually soft... His senses were starting to hallucinate, probably, to think that he would find the blood under him particularly comfortable.

Lying in a pool of blood, Kaito closed his eyes, ruminating over the memory he had just witnessed.

(...Definitely the worst. Your life that no one can save.)

Banishing the heavy desire to sleep, Kaito slowly opened his eyes. His blurred vision did not allow him to discern the dark scene. However, he knew that Hina was swinging the halberd, fighting something.

She was desperately protecting Kaito. At that moment, Kaito pondered with his hazy mind.

(Even God would forsake you and leave you to your own devices. But knowing all this, you still committed your resolve to become Torturchen. I don't get why you did that.)

Kaito reached out, dipping his hand in the viscous pool of blood. Then he extended his arm farther out, to find a spot on the floor that had not been soaked by blood, then desperately moved his trembling hand.

(Why could you openly choose to live, choose to fight, without any hesitation at all...?)

Crawling with unsightliness on the ground, Kaito continued to move his finger. Ignoring his pain and blood loss, he wriggled like a worm. Thinking he was trying to escape, Vlad laughed and whispered:

"The master intends to abandon you in battle and flee? Even so, will you still continue?"

"Lord Kaito is escaping? Wonderful! Then I will buy time for him!"

The noise of clashing weapons resounded repeatedly. Kaito crawled bit by bit under the flash of blades. Writing with blood, he connected lines with lines and smiled lightly.

"However, sure enough, we... definitely are similar, in some ways. This is what they call kindred spirits, I guess."

Krulus was right, Kaito definitely resembled Elisabeth in certain ways. Kaito reached out a bit more, squishing his internal organs while writing.

"I've already died..... So there's no way for me to punch him while still alive. But you... are alive, so do it now... Beat up your father, viciously."

Kaito traced his finger to connect the beginning and the end of the circle. After doing that, he collapsed on the ground. He could feel hot magical power in the blood. Only then did Vlad realize and shout in alarm:

"—This is..."

In front of Kaito, the teleportation magic circle of Elisabeth's was done.

Due to experiences in his past life, Kaito had mastered the special skill of never forgetting any experience accompanied by pain. Using this special skill, he had carved the map of Elisabeth's castle onto his own skin and memorized it without hesitation.

Furthermore, reaching an agreement with Elisabeth one time, he had Elisabeth carve her teleportation magic circle on his abdomen.

The magic circle Kaito had drawn from memory began to pulsate while the blood carrying Elisabeth's magical power started to flow. The vivid red color began to shine like a melted ruby.

Assisted by the light from the magic circle, Kaito was finally able to see what was inside the room. Vlad was releasing attacks with an anxious look while Hina took them on desperately. Kaito spat blood and shouted:

"Then you should settle everything on your own and go to hell as you had sworn! Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

As Kaito yelled, darkness erupted with a mad dance of red petals in the room.

A long skirt hem fluttered in the air together with the storm of darkness and red flowers. The scarlet on the inner side of the skirt drifted across Kaito's view. The beautiful girl showed up, her elegantly-shaped chest clad in leather straps and puffed out proudly. Her gorgeous black hair fluttered in the wind while her red eyes reflected Kaito's image.

Dressed in a bondage-style dress, the otherworldly beauty landed on Kaito's blood and guts.

This scene was so beautiful yet so infuriating too.

Held in her pale hand was the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstahl.

"Hellooooooooooooooo, Vlad."

Elisabeth instantly figured out the situation and laughed madly and viciously. Her lips were curled with extreme malice and fearlessness. Vlad timidly took a step back.

All covered in blood, Elisabeth was not exhibiting the Church's restraints, but Vlad was. Furthermore, the Emperor was not by his side. As though looking at prey that had been delivered right to her door, Elisabeth licked her lips greedily.

She pointed the Executioner's Sword of Frankenstein high up. Red petals and darkness spiraled around the blade. Next, she swung down the glowing longsword just like that, as though giving the order for an execution.

"Forsaken by all creation across heaven and earth—Die in solitude!"

An explosion of chains formed a vortex in the room, flying over Hina's head just as she ducked down swiftly in a prone position. Smashing the other doll maids into smithereens, the chains entangled Vlad like snakes. Vlad struggled as hard as he could, trying to use blue petals and darkness to sever the chains but every time he struggled, a new chain would tie up his body. Squeezed until his bones creaked, his flesh was crushed.

".....Gah."

Spontaneously, he was hung in the air by the chains just as like Elisabeth in the past. Red petals gradually accumulated in the surroundings, but as though mourning the dead, the great quantity of red petals instantly melted away, transforming into a large wooden stake for execution by fire. Using chains to bind Vlad, Elisabeth swung her sword again. The sword's trajectory left red flames in its wake, flying forth. Rather than the blue flames of demons, this was the red flames of humans.

As though punished at the hands of the people, Vlad was burning in human flames.

"...To think I... by the likes of, this... What an outrage, Elisabeth."

Pitch-black darkness and blue petals swirled in Vlad's surroundings but could not cut the chains. The flames reached the edges of his magnificent coat then started to burn his skin slowly. Vlad widened his eyes in disbelief.

His red eyes glared at Elisabeth. Elisabeth smiled gently at him in return. Finally coming to terms with his situation, Vlad swept his gaze around his surroundings.

At that instant, only then did Vlad finally realize that death had him firmly in its grip.

Blank mutters with a tone of dependence leaked out from his lips intermittently.

"Elisabeth... Elisabeth... Elisabeth..... Elisabeth."

"Oppressive rulers need to be killed, tyrants need to be hanged, genociders need to be slaughtered brutally. This is natural law. What awaits at the endpoint of the path of torture is hell without a shred of redemption, adorned by one's own screams. Only then does the torturer's life come to a conclusion. Man at the root of all evil, you shall set off first. I shall not run away and will follow you in the near future."

Vlad's long hair began to burn. Abandoning his dignity completely, his entire body shook violently. With a slight cracking sound from the stake, the flames ignited his muscles. Towards this man who was burning like an ordinary person, Elisabeth declared:

"Execution by Fire—This is the most fitting resolution for you and I."

"Elisabeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth!"

With a scream of rage and anguish, Vlad was devoured by the flames.

The fire caused his face to bloat then char, turning his flesh into charcoal, gradually erasing his entire existence. Even the bones he left behind were mercilessly crushed by the chains. In the end, he was turned into pure white ash, scattering in the wind. Hence, Vlad Le Fanu became one of many corpses begrudging Elisabeth.

Thus in such a simple manner, the man who followed The Emperor and had created Torturchen met his demise.



Then after that, Elisabeth remained the only one standing there as always.

Inside the room where heat from the fire lingered, she slowly closed her eyes and looked up to the sky. Her black hair fluttered in the wind behind her. Red petals danced, some of them settling on her skin.

Confronted with the death of one with inseparable ties to her, Elisabeth inhaled then opened her eyes.

"Too weak!"

Then raising a fist into the sky, she declared her victory happily.

*Out of all things you could've said, I can't believe you picked that...*

While thinking that, Kaito released his consciousness that he had been clinging to by force.

# 瀬名 権人

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長きに渡る虐待の末に、無残に殺された少年。エリザベートに召喚され、彼女の従者を勤めることになる。生前の経験から、恐怖や怒り、憎悪など、激情を覚えると逆に冷静になる側面がある。

F r e m o t o r t u r c h e n

ハルローライフ



## Epilogue

---

"Soooooooooooo delicious!"

Holding a fork and a knife in her hands, Elisabeth exclaimed excitedly.

In front of her was ox tongue jelly, gizzard rillette, kidney pie with blue cheese sauce, and tripe cutlet.

"Lady Elisabeth, I am not worthy of your praise."

"Your reactions to food are crazy intense."

Hina smiled and bowed her head demurely. Holding a wine bottle in one hand, Kaito was standing by Elisabeth's side. Whenever she finished her glass, he would mechanically refill her glass.

This distribution of roles did not take human qualities into account at all. With half-dead eyes, Kaito was pouring wine in a completely boorish manner. However, Elisabeth seemed to be tolerant of inadequacies in wine serve as long as the food was good, and she downed her wine readily. This job was fairly easy, but Kaito sighed as he looked down at his clothing.

(It's about time she prepared some better fitting clothes for me than a butler's uniform.)

It was unknown whether Elisabeth was even aware of Kaito's dissatisfaction. Today, she ate all of Hina's cooking as usual but after finishing the final dish and just when Kaito had poured another glass of wine, she suddenly said:

"Are you really sure?"

"About what?"

Several days had gone by since taking down The Emperor and returning from that stone castle.

Since then, Elisabeth was broaching the subject for the first time.

That night, when Kaito was taken back to the castle, he had confessed to Elisabeth about how he intended to accept Vlad's invitation at one oint. However, Elisabeth simly healed him silently and kicked him into bed. Hina spent the whole night holding the hand of the comatose Kaito whereas Elisabeth went to handle reporting to the Church.

The next day, what await Kaito was his twisted daily life that was arguably not too unpleasant. He was starting to think that at this rate he might not find a chance to broach the issue, hence he was caught unprepared when Elisabeth asked on her own. With multiple matters coming to mind, unsure of which one, Kaito began to puzzle.

Elisabeth raised a slender finger.

"First matter. About seeking asylum from the Church."

"Oh, whether I go or not, it doesn't change the fact that 'I'm a rare soul from another world,' right? They also seem kind of useless and it's over for me if I run into someone like Krulus again. I've no way

of resisting them and there's no guarantee I won't be treated like a labrat, so for now, I don't want to side with them."

"For now, is that so?"

"I guess. Let's be practical here, the fact that 'I have to die after your death' still doesn't feel real to me, so I can't make any promises when I finally recognize it. Perhaps I might run crying to the Church and beg them for mercy."

"Well, that does suit your style."

"Yeah, I don't wanna get dragged to hell by you."

"Hmph, I would not want to take you either."

Elisabeth replied coldly and swirled her empty glass. Responding to her silent demand, Kaito sloppily poured wine into her glass. Swirling the wine glass, Elisabeth continued.

"Then there is the second matter. Are you really fine with that?"

"Uh... Yeah. Well, it's fine, umm."

"Really? Since you say so, I shall take your word for it."

Unlike Kaito who had received Elisabeth's transfusion, Kaito's father had bled dry inside his golem body and his soul had vanished. Although Elisabeth could use magic to summon him back, Kaito declined. He asked Elisabeth to retrieve the doll that used to contain his father's soul then buried it behind the castle.

Burial had no meaning. Even so, Kaito still felt compelled to do it, so he went and did it.

That was all.

Kaito did not feel like maintaining his father's grave at all. Soon enough, that place would end up overgrown with weeds and wild flowers, naturally flourishing. Kaito believed that was good enough already.

Simply being able to think that already helped in coming to terms with his feelings.

Kaito shifted his gaze back to Elisabeth in front of him. All this had begun from her willful ways. The one who plunged Kaito in this utter mess, forcing a second life upon him was precisely Torturchen.

Kaito shrugged and said her casually:

"Oh well, being summoned by you and resurrected like this counts as a kind of destiny, I guess... So, I will accompany you as much as possible until you descend to hell."

At the time of her death, Elisabeth would be all alone. No demon would exist by her side.

However, until it was time for her execution, there would still be space for others by her side.

During Elisabeth Le Fanu's life of bloodshed, she was always accompanied by a clumsy servant.

Kaito felt that this picture was not half bad.

Elisabeth glanced sideways at Kaito and laughed like a cat, shrugging.

"Ha, so what? It does not please me at all even if I have servant like you, lacking in loyalty and cannot even cook well, to follow me until the bitter end."

"I'm the one who isn't pleased. Can't you make fewer demands when I'm from another world and have no idea how to cook internal organs?"

"Watch it or I shall torture you to death. Whatever, serve *that*, your one and only skill."

"Fine fine, it's been a while since I last made it."

Kaito followed her orders and returned the wine bottle to the bowl. He picked up the clay pot that was cooling on the iced container. Hina also stopped working, leaning forward from the side to watch.

Seeing the two of them extending their necks in anticipation, Kaito opened the lid all at once.

"Oh my, so this is Lord Kaito's prided pudding! How magnificent!"

"Yes, this smooth texture is quite addictive. I do desire it once in a while. Time to dig in."

Looking at Elisabeth, who had picked up her spoon impatiently, and the excited Hina, Kaito realized something unintentionally. Trembling, he touched his own face.

Hanging on his face was definitely a natural smile.

(.....Ahhh, don't tell me, this is...)

Recalling the promise between him and Neue, Kaito watched the scene before him with a calm expression.

There was Elisabeth and Hina. If possible, he wished these twisted and pleasant days could persist indefinitely. He wished that days like this would not be lost amid the excessively fierce battles. For the very first time in his life, Kaito prayed in this manner. As for himself, he intended to continue giving his all to realize this wish.

This was to uphold his promise with Neue and to honor what he had just said to Elisabeth.

"Torturchen" Elisabeth Le Fanu had summoned him from another world.

That moment when she was forsaken by all creation, dying in solitude, finally descending into hell...

...Probably was not going to arrive just yet.

## Afterword

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Hello everyone, and nice to meet you for those who are new, I am Ayasato.

I sincerely thank you for buying *Fremd Torturchen*. Those of you who are browsing the novel in the bookstore! I will hug you as hard as I can to stop you from dropping the book before you finish! As my grandfather says, books should be taken straight to the cashier for checkout. Specifically, doing so would ensure a +3 to your luck stat... Perhaps. As for whether it really works or not, I'll leave that unanswered.

*Fremd Torturchen* is my first story published under MF Bunko J, so I'm quite nervous. Please look forward to it as much as possible.

About *Fremd Torturchen*, this image of an evil and beautiful princess who manipulated countless instruments of torture and execution as "Torturchen," I've been wanting to write about her for a long time already. However, I didn't have any ideas for stuff like why is the protagonist with her and why would he choose to serve her, so that's why the story took a while to take form. It was when the editor gave me a suggestion, "how about combining dark elements with the transported to another world genre?" Thanks to that, the opening segment of being summoned by Torturchen and coerced to serve her began to surface in my mind, then the story of Kaito and Elisabeth was rapidly done.

The great sinner whose final fate was execution by fire, and the young man who had obtained a new life, what developments would unfold for them next? I'm sure it will be fun to find out. By the way, Animate offers a limited edition booklet with a slice-of-life

story taking place after the main plot, involving our two protagonists, the wife-like maid Hina who loves the male protagonist with all her might, and the Meat Supplier. Although there's no harm in not reading it, but interested readers, please check it out (decisively entering advertising mode at every opportunity.) If it's not too much to ask, I'd be very happy even if you only admired Ukai Saki-sensei's specially drawn cover. When the second volume is published without issue, if you could show your support then, I would be overjoyed.

Please oblige me, if you will.

There's still a bit of space left in the afterword, so let me get to acknowledgements.

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